LABS
CONTEMPORARY ART

Via Santo Stefano 38 – 40125 Bologna IT
Tel. +39 051 3512448 | Mob. +39 348 9325473
info@labsgallery.it
www.labsgallery.it

Fringe

Curated by Marta Orsola Sironi
LABS Contemporary

"But what is the point of writing if not to unearth things, or even just one thing that cannot be reduced to any kind of psychological or sociological explanation and is not the result of a preconceived idea or demonstration but a narrative: something that emerges from the creases when a story is unfolded and can help us understand — endure — events that occur and the things that we do?"

Annie Ernaux, *A Girl's Story*, translated by Alison L. Strayer

"Fringe":

noun

1. the border or outer edges of an area or group.
2. a decorative border of hanging threads left loose or formed into tassels or twists, used to edge clothing or material.
3. in golf, an area surrounding the green where the grass is longer than the grass on the green but shorter than the grass on the fairway.
4. a part of a group that is not very powerful or is more extreme than the main group and does not include many of its members. the outer or less important part of an area, group, or activity. Not part of the mainstream, unconventional, peripheral, or extreme.

adjective

1. not part of the mainstream; unconventional, peripheral, or extreme.

Fringe indicates both a border or its decorative part and something marginal, peripheral, or external to a group; therefore, something outside the mainstream, and thus unconventional.
Thinking closely, it does not signify a fixed or impenetrable border, but rather a decorative threshold—porous and shifting, like a tender membrane stirred by the breeze.
This project takes its cue precisely from the idea of the membrane, the permeability of borders, and the encounter of liminal realities.

It was conceived for the peculiar space that LABS Contemporary inhabits. Located in the heart of Bologna, it was built in XIII AC as the Church of Santa Maria della Ceriola, part of the Ospitale di San Biagio e Ospitale di Santa Maria dei Servi. After 1816, when the Compagnia dei Servi was disbanded, the chapel was repurposed as a tavern. In 2014, it became an art gallery.

Via Santo Stefano 38 – 40125 Bologna IT
Tel. +39 051 3512448 | Mob. +39 348 9325473
info@labsgallery.it
www.labsgallery.it

This layered architecture is a metaphor for trespassing and transformation, a liminal site where time unfolds, memory resurfaces, and images echo. Here, past and present, sacred and secular, visible and invisible, brush against each other through the fringe of time, intertwining a tender dialogue.

The exhibition draws its conceptual lineage from **Aby Warburg's "Bilderatlas Mnemosyne"**, which sought to trace the persistence of memory through image. Warburg's concern was to map how certain visual motifs and gestures resurface across time and cultures. He believed that images carry psychic and emotional energies transmitted and transformed through history. In this way, the *Atlas* was not a chronological history but a psychocultural map, showing how memory, image, and affect intersect across time and space. It explored how images shape **collective memory and identity,** inviting us to **think with images**, not just about them—seeing visuality itself as a tool of orientation in the world.
As philosophers from Husserl to Heidegger, Bachelard to Sara Ahmed analyse, space is not neutral or absolute—it is a lived condition. To orient, then, is not merely to locate oneself but to inhabit a space, to make meaning from our surroundings. It is how we find our place and feel at home in a constantly shifting world. Visual knowledge, then, is a **homing device** — a symbolic compass that helps us position ourselves in the cosmos.

However, in contemporary society, where fixed truths unravel and we find ourselves dispersed, how can we locate points of orientation? How can we orient ourselves, ethically and imaginatively, when everything is increasingly mediated and mediatised, and even what is seen, let alone remembered, trembles under the pressure of doubt?
If the world spins like a frenzied grain of sand, as Pirandello once wrote, and the horizon has grown dim under the weight of war, genocide, the resurgence of totalitarian ideologies, and ongoing social divisions, where can we find anchors of meaning to hold onto?
When even advocating for peace has become something we are sared of, what critical spaces remain for active knowledge, cultural resistance, and poetic imagination?

Perhaps we should do like images: we begin to move.

In "Nomadic Subjects" and "The Posthuman", **Rosi Braidotti** reimagines subjectivity, identity, and belonging through the intertwined concepts of **nomadism** and **orientation**. Nomadism, for Braidotti, is not a literal movement through space, but a metaphor for a critical, flexible, and resistant way of being in the world. The **nomadic subject** refuses fixity—of identity, place, or meaning—and instead embraces **fluidity, multiplicity, and continuous transformation**.
This mode of subjectivity resonates with **Sara Ahmed's** notion of orientation, which she describes as the ongoing effort to find one's place within shifting social, political, and psychic landscapes. In this sense, **nomadism becomes a form of orientation**: a way of navigating complexity where identity is not anchored in permanence but in movement, in responsiveness to change.
To orient oneself, then, could be understood as is **to live in the *in-between***—to dwell in the threshold—and to remake one's relation with the world through becoming rather than being. Once we can **embrace the crossing**, we leave behind fixed truths and inherited knowledge. We begin to wander the layers of reality, and slowly, in movement we learn to stand still—even when everything else falls apart.

"Fringe" explores the crossing and **the threshold as a fertile place for encounters and reconfiguration**. It investigates the construction of collective and individual memory and knowledge,

Via Santo Stefano 38 – 40125 Bologna IT
Tel. +39 051 3512448 | Mob. +39 348 9325473
info@labsgallery.it
www.labsgallery.it

the symbolic use of imagery as an orientation tool, and the possibility of inner liberation through poetic acts and critical imagination.

"Fringe" is an invitation to cross and inhabit borderlands, be lulled by instability, to challenge common truth and power structures, to wander and be nomadic in the search for one's position in the world and to open spaces for critical discourse for reimagining the future.

Artists Ty Locke, Amba Sayal-Bennett, Hannah Morgan, Hoa Dung Clerget, Dionysis Saraji, Luca Rubegni, Agnieszka Mastalerz, Alexei Izmaylov, and Paula Santomé navigate this fringe space through distinct yet interwoven practices. Their works span drawing, painting, sculpture, installation, and video, mapping inner architectures and cosmologies, speculative cartographies and symbolic systems. Each engages in a form of rebellious practice, where forms and images are not static but generative, carrying the tension between personal histories and collective dynamics. In their works, orientation becomes disorientation, a conscious act of wandering and trespass. A poetic act able to dismantle barriers and to unearth things, or even "just one thing that cannot be reduced, simplified or silenced" and is not the result of a preconceived idea or demonstration but a narrative: something that emerges from the creases, the interstices, the fringes and can help us understand our reality and reimagine our future.

To fringe is to stand at the threshold.
To fringe is to wander and trespass.
To fringe is to remember forward.
To fringe is to imagine otherwise.
To fringe is to find freedom in uncertainty.

LABS
CONTEMPORARY ART

Via Santo Stefano 38 – 40125 Bologna IT
Tel. +39 051 3512448 | Mob. +39 348 9325473
info@labsgallery.it
www.labsgallery.it

Dionysis Saraji (b. 2001, Venice, Italia) is a visual artist of Iranian and Greek heritage. Saraji's vibrant, hybrid figures draw from Persian decorative traditions (observed through his father's memories and traditional symbols in decorative elements such as miniatures and rugs), and Greek myth, blending ceramic, textile, and fantasy to explore the fluidity of the body and the exploration of the fine line that divides reality from fiction. Such topics are reworked in a playful key, while the body changes in its relationship between sculpture and drawing.

Saraji's mytho-political creatures inhabit a joyfully ambiguous zone between innocence and subversion, appearing in the midst of their own becoming. The artist proposes a queered ontology of play, celebration, and metamorphosis. His is a poetics of joy and, simultaneously, a politics of transformation, to draw a new map—one in which the micro—the artist's personal history and experience of gender transition—intertwines with the macro: the global realities of migration, the struggle for self-determination, and the hope for a world free of discrimination.
Through drawing and sculpture, Saraji rewrites human stories with acute sensitivity, placing smiles of rebirth where once stood symbols of constraint; radiant suns where breath is reborn; fragile, brightly coloured armours to protect small-yet-mighty heroes—champions of freedom, no less noble for their vulnerability.

These bodies exist without taking a stance—or perhaps they choose, in every moment, to take up space. They seem a little irreverent, or maybe just very naive: they mingle and intertwine, but there seems to be no malice.
They never reveal themselves during metamorphosis (which usually takes place far from discreet gazes, in third spaces inaccessible to anyone); they simply appear changed, present in the actions they perform, in their perpetual dissolving.

Ty Locke (b. 1996, Maidstone, United Kingdom) is a London-based artist whose sculptural practice intertwines personal history with broader social critique. Rooted in queer identity and his working-class upbringing in Kent, Locke transforms everyday domestic materials into poetic disruptions—reframing the familiar to question dominant narratives of class, masculinity, and affect. His works invite viewers to reconsider the ordinary, revealing the layered intersections of the personal and the political.

A central body of work within Locke's practice is his neon series, which originates in the artist's lived experience with dyslexia. The works draw attention to the specific difficulties dyslexia presents, particularly in the English language, where orthographic inconsistency and historical under-recognition have made reading and writing more challenging. In this series, groups of words are shaped into sculptural forms as they are read by the artist himself, materialised through the humble medium of bent Bic pens.

Locke's decision to create *fake* neon sculptures is a deliberate reflection on the elitism embedded in the medium's history. Traditionally costly and accessible only to a privileged few, neon becomes here an everyday object—stripped of glamour, denying light, and generating shadows instead of illumination.

This metalinguistic inversion lies at the heart of Locke's practice: the pen no longer bends the word; the word bends the pen. These works offer a sharp, ironic commentary on the hierarchies of medium and language and an embodied, empathetic insight into neurodivergent experience. They allow us to step into the artist's condition—and yet do so with a sense of humor, gentleness, and intelligence that transforms difficulty into connection.

LABS
CONTEMPORARY ART

Via Santo Stefano 38 – 40125 Bologna IT
Tel. +39 051 3512448 | Mob. +39 348 9325473
info@labsgallery.it
www.labsgallery.it

Alexei Izmaylov (b. 1985, Voronezh, Russia) is a London-based artist and curator whose practice "ping-pongs between image-making and sculpture." Humour and a knowingly irreverent use of materials are hallmarks of his work, which draws from a wide range of references: contemporary culture, pop imagery, industrial design, fashion, and critical theory spanning psychology and sociology.
Constructed from original components and industrially sourced materials, Izmaylov's sculptural objects and photographic interventions channel absurdity, desire, and critique. These works often blur the line between function and futility, creating a playful tension that questions systems of value and meaning.
Central to his practice is an exploration of agency—how it is expressed, embodied, and disrupted. Through queer aesthetics and performative gestures, Izmaylov reconfigures fragments of the past to open up new possibilities for identity, memory, and belonging. Beneath the humour lies a persistent drive toward transformation and reinvention.

The artist's work evolves through series—reworked, revisited, and ruminated upon—that grow like autonomous yet interconnected organisms: rhizomatic entities that carry an ongoing theoretical investigation into the visual realm.

"SAFETY TETHERS", inspired by the familiar figure of the teddy bear, but made with materials typical of interior design, present hybrid creatures accessorised with detachable ropes and carabiners, making them equally suited to lounging or suspension. Soft and drooping, they refer to Winnicott's notion of the *transitional object*, which marks the passage when the child begins to understand the difference between self and not-self. They have hermaphroditic genitalia, making them at once humorous, tender, and at the same time politically charged. These bears become vessels for reflection on gender bias, play, and psychoanalysis, almost like gender fetishes—scarecrows for bigoted gazes. The title references child harnesses—elastic or retractable leashes marketed to parents as "safe options" for controlling toddlers in public. This double meaning adds another layer of irony: control disguised as care, affection tethered to surveillance.
The bears, in their quiet, slumped presence, oscillate between comfort and discomfort, humour and resistance. They are transitional objects in the truest sense: not just marking a passage, but becoming a passage—between body and symbol, identity and ambiguity, restraint and relation.
Here, they are presented casually seated on the gallery chairs, as if they were regular visitors who've paused mid-conversation to nap—leaving a word hanging unfinished in the air of the former church.

"TELLING TELLER TALES" is a photographic series revisiting Juergen Teller and Nicolas Ghesquière's 2014 folio "I Just Arrived in Paris".
Ten years later, the original folded posters, tear sheets, and prints are carefully rebuilt and re-photographed—not to replicate, but to explore how time alters images and their meaning. Creases, folds, and surface wear remain visible, partially obscuring the original subjects and resisting quick consumption.
This work reflects on memory, reproduction, and authenticity, positioning the images between object and trace, use and archive. The medium shifts, perception evolves, and value changes over time, revealing what endures and what fades.
Izmaylov's related *Polaroid* works continue this exploration of unique, constructed images using a signature format inspired by discontinued medium format peel-apart film, preserving their ephemeral, one-of-a-kind quality.

Via Santo Stefano 38 – 40125 Bologna IT
Tel. +39 051 3512448 | Mob. +39 348 9325473
info@labsgallery.it
www.labsgallery.it

"CHANNELS" aka "PLUGS, GNOMES" are detachable sculptures designed to safely fit UK electrical sockets, supplied with a faux electrical connection. Building on ideas around Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO). They do not have any function or power and do not activate. They are pure forms, objects you encounter in the space without any real interpretation to give us. And when we face them we are drawn to ask ourselves what they represent. We want answers from them that they can't give. They refer to Deleuze and Guattari's *desiring-machines*, basic units of desire, any system (biological, social, mechanical) where desire flows, links with other systems, and creates something new. CHANNEL inception mimics consumption — in particular, the consumption of art. They are designed to fit into existing liminal spaces, overlooked and neglected pieces of reality, and they thrive together in groups. They resist language, yet invite you to play.

For Izmaylov, art-making is a way of understanding how he thinks about the world. His works flirt with the viewer through sleek forms and dry humour, drawing the gaze in—only to flip it back, questioning the very act of looking, and with it, the mechanisms of understanding (or misunderstanding). In his practice, aesthetic seduction becomes critical disorientation.
So the question arises: *Can art make us think?* And further still: *Must it be useful to matter?*
To quote the artist himself:
"If you want utility, buy a toaster."

Luca Rubegni (b. 1993, Rome, Italia) is an Italian painter based in Paris whose work moves between the poetic and the theatrical, the intimate and the symbolic. His canvases feature everyday objects—vases, flowers, architectural fragments, oriental fabrics, references to old advertisement campaigns and vintage logos—arranged in staged, dreamlike compositions that evoke a suspended, almost metaphysical stillness. These objects become portals to an imagined elsewhere, offering psychological comfort and escape.
Rooted in literature and myth, Rubegni draws from ancient legends, novels, and poetry to construct a personal iconography. His paintings blur the line between memory and imagination, transforming familiar motifs into new narratives. Through vibrant colour and unexpected visual pairings, he crafts an aesthetic language that is distinctly his own.
Rubegni explores the interplay between image and story, inviting viewers into a space where reality and fantasy quietly dissolve. Hover in a state of metaphysical stillness, those paintings function as a visual poem: a suspended space where memory does not depict but performs.

Observing Rubegni's paintings requires silence and attention—it demands listening as much as looking, as if we were in a theatre, waiting for the play to begin. And yet, the play is already underway. It started long before we entered the room and will continue long after we have left.
Much like ancient Greek theatre, where the stage, with its succinct three-arch structure, held a symbolic meaning instantly legible to the audience, Rubegni's paintings are composed of small details, gestures that seem incidental but are in fact deeply intentional and meaningful, and thus able to resonate within our memory. Silent architectures and charged objects occupy the scene with quiet intensity.
This is a practice rooted in the close study of detail and, to use a Warburgian term, the *iconographic* weight of each element. Rubegni's profound knowledge of art history and design enables him not simply to paint, but, through painting, to undertake a meta-pictorial reflection on painting itself—on its potential to represent the possible, and more crucially, to actively imagine the impossible.
But how can it be impossible, if the artist has succeeded in translating it into mark and colour?
Maybe we just need to look closer.

Via Santo Stefano 38 – 40125 Bologna IT
Tel. +39 051 3512448 | Mob. +39 348 9325473
info@labsgallery.it
www.labsgallery.it

Looking closer is an exercise that all the artists in this exhibition demand.
With Hannah Morgan (b. 1985, United Kingdom) we are asked to turn our gaze underground—and, more broadly, beyond.
Bachelard and other philosophers teach us that lived space—that is, place, what we are able to experience between our body and the horizon—is defined within the range of our gaze. But what about those depths, those beyonds we can only brush with thought, that we grasp only through the abstract power of myth, and that resonate within us, pulsing from the earth through to our blood with a force that overwhelms and eludes all human language? It is precisely there that Hannah invites us to enter: where the songs of miners echo with the thousand voices of the goddess and where remote civilisations still murmur—where, to quote Cristina Ceruti and Federico Bocchi, "the origins of stories originate," those which persists before history, and yet are histories themselves—only we do not remember it yet.

Morgan is currently working on the "Animula" series, an expansive sculptural installation examining the geographic entanglement of organisms, people, and materials at various cave sites and mines in the UK. Based on research in the Moray Firth caves in Scotland and early mining cartography, the works use excavation as an entry point, exploring relationships of entangled, precarious matter and organisms in states of emergence and decay. "Animula" offers sculptural meditations on emergence, loss, and transformation. Working with alabaster, steel, and sound, Morgan creates layered environments that echo with geological time and bodily fragility. In "Fringe", her work stands as a monument to the threshold—the porous space between above and below, surface and depth, life and dissolution. Her practice weaves mourning and metamorphosis into new spatial imaginaries.

Early humans withdrew to caves to paint and give shape to thought. In caves, oracles and sibyls dwelt. In quarries, within the truth of stone, sculpture already exists in potential. Cave paintings were not mere depictions of the cosmos but projections of thought, propitiatory acts capable of surpassing the limits of fact. As if, through the line, the human being learned to look beyond.

The practice of Amba Sayal-Bennett (b. 1991, London, United Kingdom) emerges from her dual heritage—British and Indian—and reflects on abstraction as a method of translation and, by extension, translocation: of forms, of bodies, of identities. Working across drawing, sculptural installation, and projection, Sayal-Bennett interrogates how abstraction operates as both exclusionary and performative, constructing boundaries between what is present, overtly absent, and othered.
Her recent work focuses on the migration of modernist forms and their embeddedness within fascist and brutalist architectures. Using translation as a methodology, she traces the movement of bodies, forms, and knowledge across contexts—processes that lie at the heart of diasporic experience.

For Sayal-Bennett, drawing is not simply a medium but a conceptual tool—a way to interrogate how lines, diagrams, and partitions operate across disciplines, from architecture and medicine to political and technological systems. Her line is a constant: a thread that traverses dimensions, moving from two to three while always retaining its graphic intensity.
At the heart of Sayal-Bennett's work is the cut: a gesture that both reveals and severs. Her practice interrogates how incisions—literal and symbolic—structure meaning, delineate bodies, and reproduce systems of power. Whether tracing the sterile paths of laser-cut forms or mapping the ruptures of colonial history, her diagrams ask: *What does it mean to divide? Who defines the line? Who is left out?*

Via Santo Stefano 38 – 40125 Bologna IT
Tel. +39 051 3512448 | Mob. +39 348 9325473
info@labsgallery.it
www.labsgallery.it

Drawing on biographical and postcolonial narratives—including her family's multigenerational relationship to medical knowledge and her reflection on the 1947 Partition of British India—Sayal-Bennett positions abstraction as a double-edged act: capable of clarity, but also erasure. Her work critiques institutional spaces such as the gallery, the clinic, and the archive, exposing how aesthetic "neutrality" often masks ideological violence.
By merging digital precision with embodied critique, Sayal-Bennett challenges the clinical detachment of modernist form. Her works do not offer answers—they disrupt, unsettle, and demand a rethinking of how we draw, define, and divide the world around us.

Her practice analyses the symbolic and political force of images, tracing how inherited systems of classification map bodies, space, and history through acts of abstraction and division.

Hoa Dung Clerget (b. 1985, Paris, France) is a French-Vietnamese artist based in London. Her multidisciplinary practice spans painting, sculpture, installation, craft, and performance. She focuses on the transformation of domestic objects to explore themes of memory, cultural transmission, and diasporic identity.

Hoa Dung Clerget creates installations and objects that delve into the labour of immigrant women, the Nail Art subculture, and the micro-societies found in nail salons. As a member of the Vietnamese diaspora, Clerget's works reflect a close relationship with the nail salon ecosystem, seeking to give tangible form to the labour of women from the community. The goal is to shift public perception of the beauty business and the popular art anchored in everyday life.

In 1975, following the fall of Saigon, actress Tippi Hedren volunteered at a refugee camp near Sacramento, where she noticed Vietnamese women admiring her manicured nails. She brought her personal manicurist to teach them nail care skills and helped them enrol in beauty school to obtain professional licenses. This initiative empowered many Vietnamese women to find work in salons across Southern California. Over time, this group grew, sharing knowledge within their communities, leading to Vietnamese Americans becoming a major presence in the U.S. nail industry—a trend that continues today.

Today, however, the nail salon industry relies heavily on underpaid and undocumented labour, often lacking proper regulation and protections, especially concerning the use of highly toxic materials. In hindsight, Tippi Hedren's initiative reveals itself as yet another example of "civilisational feminism". Quoting Françoise Vergès, civilisational feminism is a form of imperialist feminism that arises in Western countries and presents itself as the saviour of non-Western women. Within this framework, women from the Global South are depicted as passive victims needing liberation through the intervention of white "progressive" women, often disregarding the historical, colonial, political, and economic contexts that created these conditions of oppression. According to Vergès, this feminism does not challenge the structures of racial capitalism; rather, it becomes complicit by promoting emancipation through precarious and exploited labour, often justifying it as empowerment.

At the same time, however, over the years, the Vietnamese community in the West has begun to identify with this contemporary tradition of nail art and embrace it as a factor of community.

Hoa Dung Clerget revitalises gel nail polish techniques, exploring innovative methods that harness the unique chemical properties of these materials to create multi-layered works embodying the

Via Santo Stefano 38 – 40125 Bologna IT
Tel. +39 051 3512448 | Mob. +39 348 9325473
info@labsgallery.it
www.labsgallery.it

complex narratives of Vietnamese immigrants. By approaching gel polish as a painterly medium, the artist challenges the conventional status of this art form within contemporary practice. Central to Clerget's work are themes of displacement, framed by the tension between beauty and toxicity, safety and precarity, interiority and exteriority. She investigates the invisible architectures of care, beauty, and diasporic labour. Her practice reclaims decoration as resistance, transforming Nail Art's ephemeral surfaces into lasting topographies of memory and cultural survival.

The nail polish flowers created by the artist bloom open to reveal two kinds of scenes: community halls and images of Asian women represented nude and in intimate moments. The first series, also featured in the video - "Chinoiserie (UK Next Top Nails) - explores moments of gathering among migrant communities in London. In the video, we witness the annual Vietnamese one, organised as a Nail Art competition.

Cerget's practice navigates the popular and kitschy aesthetics alongside oriental objects, revealing the layered ambiguities embedded in gaze, taste, and the dynamics of exoticisation. Proceeding from the 18th-century theory of Orientalism and its stereotypic representations, Hoa Dung Clerget engages with the feminist and anthropological reinterpretation of the term proposed by Anne Anlin Cheng in *Ornamentalism* (2019). As Cheng explains, the Western gaze did not merely exoticise Eastern cultures—it ontologically shaped Asian women as ornamental objects, embodying qualities such as beauty, delicacy, and inaccessible grace, often likened to the materials and surfaces typical of East Asian artistic production, like silk, ceramics, and lacquerware.

The format of the works, with the small scenes veiled between pearl petals, puts the viewer in the position of the voyeur, challenging our own ambiguous way of facing the dynamics of racialisation and sexualisation. The artist explores this conflation of race, gender, and ornament through her use of materials culturally associated with hyper-femininity. Her practice turns surfaces historically marked by fetishisation into sites of critique and resistance. In doing so, Clerget not only challenges reductive notions of Asian femininity but also reclaims ornament as a powerful visual and political language.

Agnieszka Mastalerz (b. 1991, Łódź, Poland) is a Warsaw-based visual artist whose research-driven practice examines mechanisms of control and the processes that influence and exploit both humans and the natural environment. Working primarily with video, photography, and installation—often incorporating scientific imaging and performative elements—she exposes how restrictive systems shape intimate relationships, social structures, and ecological spaces.

Since 2020, Mastalerz has been aesthetically and conceptually analyzing structures used in horticulture to support plants. These sculpture-like, rigid, and often steel objects present a striking contrast to the vulnerability of flora. Their explicit purpose is to define how plants will grow and in which direction they should develop; however, by restricting movement, they also impose control. Mastalerz observes these architectural constructions and makes analogue black-and-white photographs of them, focusing on their composition of lines.

During her 2021 residency in the Artist Development Programme at the European Investment Bank Institute in Luxembourg, she welded three human–sized steel structures based on her own body measurements. Collaborating with a local female choreographer, she integrated these sculptures into a performance, documenting an improvisation driven by the question of whether the structures help or hinder movement.

Via Santo Stefano 38 – 40125 Bologna IT
Tel. +39 051 3512448 | Mob. +39 348 9325473
info@labsgallery.it
www.labsgallery.it

In her "Supports" series, Mastalerz magnifies the tension between nurturing and restriction. By isolating these utilitarian steel frames in black-and-white photography, she reveals how a structure designed to care can also impose limitations. This inquiry into the "infrastructures of control that shape bodies and environments" aligns with an exploration of architectures of constraint and care. Through her analytical yet poetic visual language, Mastalerz invites viewers to reconsider how seemingly benign frameworks—whether social, corporate, or botanical—mediate freedom and form.

Paula Santomé (b. 1994, Vigo, Spain) is a contemporary visual artist whose practice spans drawing, sculpture, and relief.

In her aluminium reliefs, Santomé reimagines mythological and religious female figures—such as Pandora and Daphne—within a contemporary framework. These works challenge patriarchal narratives by endowing these icons with new agency and modes of resistance. Using poetic visual language, Santomé examines the restrictive rules imposed within intimate relationships, communities, states, corporations, and the natural environment. Her 2023 series *The Felling of Daphne* presents hand-embossed aluminium forms that portray figures caught between externally enforced identities and the urgent desire for liberation, echoing young women's struggles navigating today's social expectations.

Embossing aluminium fascinates Santomé not only as a traditional technique but also as a metaphor for her critical engagement with ancient and traditional values. In her artistic practice, reinterpreting historical methods becomes an exercise in reflecting the need to review and transform those values, adapting them to contemporary realities. This process is not merely aesthetic or technical; it is deeply socio-political, challenging established norms and fostering a dialogue between past and present. The embossing technique itself, which shapes metal without adding or removing material—through bending, expanding, and stretching within its elastic limits—mirrors the nature of myths, which evolve, adapt, and reemerge throughout history.

Although her series does not reference any specific myth, it arises from the mythological imaginary we have inherited: myth as a primordial tool of communication, a way to explain the world before the rise of science. In Greco-Roman mythology—the most influential in Western culture—stories grapple with primal, often contradictory human emotions: desire, fear, anger, revenge. For centuries, they represented the foundation upon which society built its worldview. As Tilda Swinton's narratologist character observes in *Three Thousand Years of Longing* (2022), before science, myths served to understand reality. Today, scientific logic has largely supplanted symbolic explanation, and the magic of myth seems to have faded—but has it truly disappeared, or merely mutated?

Santomé proposes that myths have not died but found new vehicles. Literature, film, and contemporary storytelling continue to fulfill a similar function. Pop culture narratives, superheroes, and fantasy sagas are echoes of ancient myths, where modern figures embody timeless fears and desires. Her work invites viewers to reconsider the enduring power of myth through a contemporary, reflective lens.

At the heart of Santomé's narratives are strong female figures who shake off traditional roles and assert themselves as creators and agents of change. She challenges art historical motifs such as the "weeping woman," traditionally depicted as a passive victim of love or abandonment, reinforcing ideas of female fragility and male rationality. In her reliefs, this dynamic is inverted: men appear

Via Santo Stefano 38 – 40125 Bologna IT
Tel. +39 051 3512448 | Mob. +39 348 9325473
info@labsgallery.it
www.labsgallery.it

vulnerable and weep, while women take control, even consuming these tears, embodying strength, complexity, and untameable power.

Santomé carries out a very similar operation to Christa Wolf's engagement with ancient myth in her later fiction, offering a powerful lens through which to examine voice, agency, and historical responsibility under conditions of repression. In both "Cassandra" (1983) and "Medea: Stimmen" (1996), Wolf reclaims these legendary women not as marginal or monstrous figures but as complex protagonists whose inner struggles illuminate the burdens of knowing—and speaking—truth in a world that refuses to listen.

Both Santomé and Wolf recast their mythic protagonists not as exotic villains or hysterical seers, but as fully realised beings wrestling with impossible choices. By doing so, they challenge readers to recognise the ways patriarchy and authoritarianism collaborate to suppress dissent and dehumanise individuals who refuse to conform.