

Arcadia Missa ð

No Escape from Blood
Castle
Penny Goring
PRESS

Flash Art

INTERVIEWS

20 May 2021, 9:00 am CET

Material Traces of the Immaterial: A Conversation with Penny Goring by [Caroline Elbaor](#)



Caroline Elbaor: First off, sincere congratulations on this pair of exhibitions. That leads to my initial question: Were these shows always planned to coincide with one another, or did the timing occur by chance?

Penny Goring: No, the timing is coincidental — scheduling for both had to change due to COVID restrictions, and the outcome was that the London show opened not long after the exhibition at Galleria Federico Vavassori in Milan. The works in each were made at different times and are part of different series.

CE: Can you walk me through the separate shows individually? What is/will be on view? How did you prepare for each, and decide which works to include where? In other words, how do you feel the two exist as standalone presentations? (Or, conversely, do you feel they function inextricably, working in tandem with one another?)

PG: The two shows function as standalone presentations that are also inextricable — because they are my shows, everything I make is entangled and connected, making the work is a continuous accumulation, each piece leads to the next or springs from earlier work, ideas submerge and resurface over time. I'm simultaneously looking backwards and forwards whilst always wanting to explore different mediums, new approaches, or revisit and expand on previous methods or themes.



CE: Although the shows are distinct from one another, in some ways they bookend the current time we are in. The work in the Arcadia Missa show was made during the latter half of 2019 and January 2020, just before COVID, whereas most of the work in the Federico Vavassori show was made during lockdown: So it's pre-COVID and post-COVID, two different cycles of work, separated by time and world-wide catastrophe. The works in each show deviate in form, by being large doll sculptures and figurative paintings on canvas in London versus tiny doll sculptures, older sculptures, and abstract paintings on velvet in Milan.

PG: Further to this, the works at the Arcadia Missa show, "No Escape from Blood Castle," belong together, I made them to be shown together, they are trapped in Blood Castle — by which I mean the Capitalist structures we ourselves cannot escape. And the works at Federico Vavassori also belong together — collectively they constitute a hellish garden where the very idea of living without torment can only ever be an enviable luxury, a dream, something to aspire to, a state of mind only snatched at briefly in moments of denial or delusion. In some ways, the title of the show — "Those who live without Torment" — does not directly refer to the world of the show itself, but rather, to that which it is lacking: which is the peace of mind many are forced to live without.

The doll sculptures at Arcadia Missa are not intended to literally represent, for example, dismemberment; their damages are metaphorical; each doll is an entity that embodies and manifests a particular state, and is an attempt to convey intense and discrete emotion by way of showing, for example with *Grief Doll* (2019), what grief can actually feel like. *Grief Doll* is forever wearing a *Grief Flower*, it is permanently strapped to her torso, where it constantly pours forth a flood of grief, represented by the long black velvet "stamens" that flow from its center and down towards the floor — this is intended to demonstrate how grief can be experienced bodily, distorting your perceptions and senses.



CE: *Doom Doll* (2019) — a smaller doll, perhaps child-size, with an amputated leg and wearing a blindfold, emanates vulnerability; it is helpless and it is obviously doomed. The amputation is not intended to shock or be gruesome — the site of the wound is a hand-sewn scarlet velvet patch, almost glamorous. The remaining lone leg becomes unbearably poignant, and the blindfold, an unmistakable indication of defenselessness, is formed from a piece of embroidered peach linen that I treasured for twenty years.

PG: I make these doll sculptures lovingly, honoring the emotions, the frailties, the symptoms of the act of living, whilst giving them a visual language that causes each doll to enact its own particular predicament. The dolls displayed in “No Escape from Blood Castle” are explicitly performing their feelings.

Excerpt from: No Escape from Blood Castle

**GHOST TOURIST
DEVIL SCAMMER
FIBBING DRIVER
KNIFE BUZZ**

**HIP FLASK
BIGGER BIJOUX
MERCY FUCKER
BAG BIRD**

**GOLDEN BOLLOCKS
FUTURE BACON
ABSTRACT GAMBLE
CAPS LOCK**

**DARKER MATTER
DEEPER LOTION
TOXIC CIRCUS
DEATH TOLL**

SEE-THROUGH NYLON
DISCO STRIPPER
FEVER FLOWERS
BOMB DROP

BLOODY CASTLE
DOLLY MOTION
SUGAR WIDOW
CLOCK STOP

Both shows are named after the poems I wrote whilst making them. The poems accompany the shows, and also act as press releases. I regard them as a kind of natural spillage, in so much as they are a written by-product of the thinking, imagining, and visualizing that informs and propels the work. The poems are material traces of the immaterial, foundational aspects of my process, and exist as an alternative medium for me to utilize. They come about unprompted during the making of the work and relate specifically to the content of each separate show. To my mind, they encapsulate the themes of the shows and also function as individual works in and of themselves.



In fact, the poems are actually a polished glimpse of what's inside my private sketchbooks, which also act as diaries, where I habitually record my inner world — there is an untrammelled mix of anything I feel, hear, see, think, or dream, including TV shows and books, that moves me enough to explore it in the form of drawings and scribbled words. It is my place of freedom. These sketchbooks are in a sense my original source, where everything I make begins, and where the poems first appear, as incidental footnotes, diatribes, observations, lists, reminders, instructions, or messages to myself.

"Those who live without Torment," as described earlier, is a wild and dangerous garden, a place where those few fortunate beings who live without torment would never want to belong.

The series of ten paintings on velvet that were made for this show are abstract, yet they could seem to suggest insect-infested plant-like forms. This aspect of the works and the poem I wrote while painting them became the initial elements that suggested the tormented garden. We then expanded on this theme by selecting three of my earlier works: *Emergency Fence* (2016), *Doom Tree* (2016), and *Wrong Rabbit* (2017), which seemed as though they were always intended for this garden.

Emergency Fence is a traditional suburban privet fence, but it hangs upside-down on the gallery wall, which causes the two long spikes that are supposed to be driven into the ground to hold the fence upright and in place (on the circumference of your perfect lawn, to demarcate the boundary of your property and safe happy life), to become inverted to suggest

weapons of self-defense — those two sharp wooden spikes are a warning, like, actually, there are dangers you need to protect yourself from here, and this pretty fence needs to be subverted, repurposed, because the emergency is constantly upon us. *Emergency Fence* could kill, if it had to. Alongside this stands *Doom Tree*, its drooping branches embroidered with a poem in scarlet thread on dense black velvets. This tree looks as if it has survived trial by fire — it's a poem-tree — it's a doom-poem, which across its various branches reads:

we invented love without loving
we trust in the grief of the night
give me the word
yes pleas thank you
poison poison

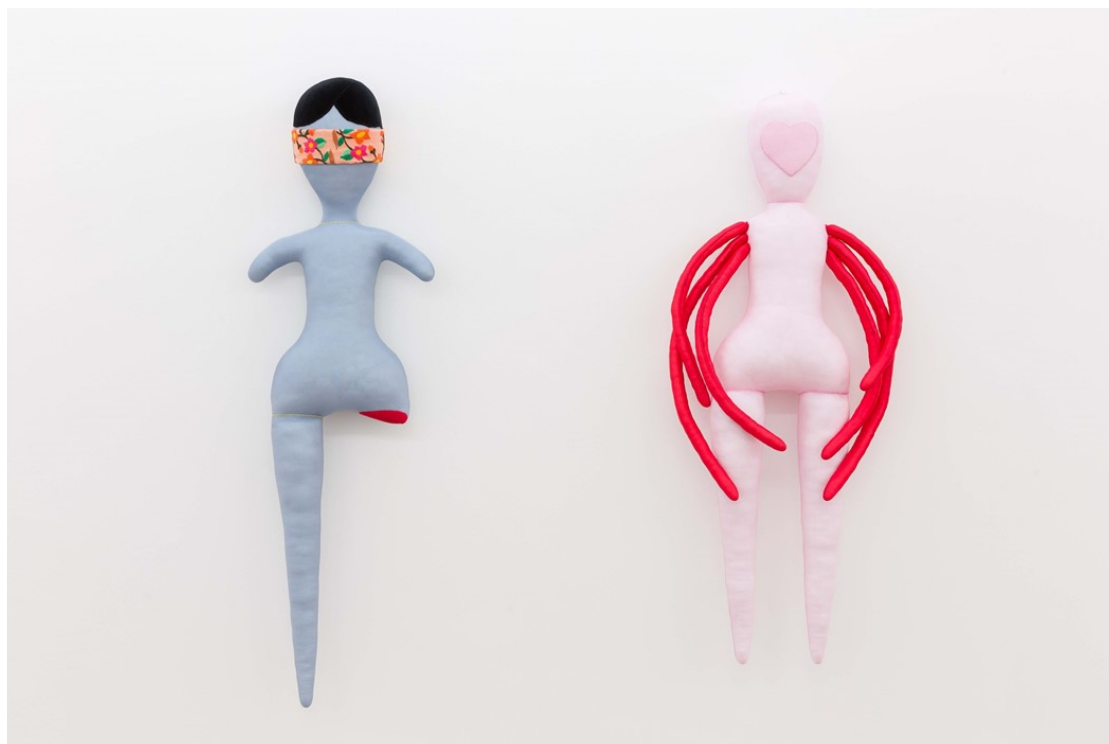
Wrong rabbit also belongs in this wild wrong garden. It is the wrong shape, wrong color, it is very carefully wrong, and it is embroidered with words proclaiming its wrongness: "Wrong Feelin, Wrong Face, Wrong Heart, Wrong Leg." Hidden across its reverse is embroidered "Stolen From Penny," suggesting my secret ambivalence at letting it go, this "Wrong Rabbit," this wrong thing, even though I willingly gave it up. I find this idea of "Wrong Rabbit" having been stolen from me to be evocative of many losses, for example, how time steals youth.

Excerpt from: *Those who live without Torment*

300 pink and yellow butterflies
and they will never die
and they will live for 48 hours
and they will never die
today i am wearing a voluminous powder blue dress, waist-high fuchsia knickers, strappy red wedge sandals, heart, what didn't kill me
Fragile gestures towards Freedom from Fuckery

Ten Brilliant Exhibitions to See as London Reopens

ART & PHOTOGRAPHY / ANOTHER LIST



Installation view of Penny Goring, Doom Doll, 2019 and War Doll, 2019 Courtesy of Arcadia Missa

As restrictions ease, a selection of exhibitions for your art-starved eyes

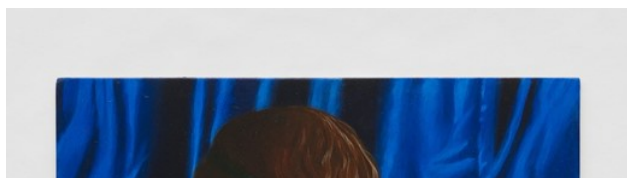
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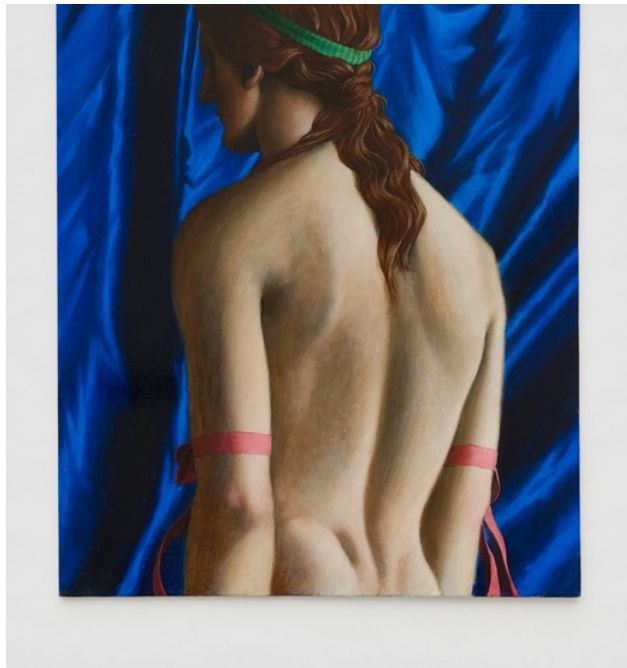
TEXT Lara Johnson-Wheeler

This spring, the multitude of **exhibitions** that have just opened in London are, frankly, a tonic for our art-starved eyes. Showcasing a rich array of both emerging and established artists, as well as a diverse mix of perspectives and mediums, gallery programmes right now are so vast, it can feel overwhelming. As such, we've done our own bit of curating, selecting ten key exhibitions to see now.

Penny Goring: No Escape from Blood Castle at Arcadia Missa, 35 Duke Street, London: Until May 27, 2021

In this Penny Goring exhibition, the artist's elegantly ominous doll forms hold their shapes while pinned to the walls, accompanied by square tiled paintings, which were created at the same time and feature the same characters. Sewing, along with her use of fabrics and shapes, subvert expectations of doll-making as a passive craft. Penny's figures are active – upside down, back to front, in action through their missing limbs or exposed hearts. Based on her own life experiences, each tells its own story.





Ryan Driscoll, Venus, 2020
 Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London. Photography by Theo Christelis

Ryan Driscoll: Holst at Soft Opening, 6 Minerva Street, London: Until May 22, 2021

Ryan Driscoll presents seven large oil on wood paintings at Soft Opening's Bethnal Green space. The artist uses mythical imagery – see the two-headed horse, the lightning pierced clouds – to represent his interpretation of English composer Gustav Holst's *The Planets*. The muscular curve of a youthful back in front of a luscious blue curtain in *Venus* (2020) is indicative of the artist's non-binary revision of the classical nude or traditional landscape.



Rhea Dillon, Janus, installation view at Soft Opening, London. Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London. Photography by Theo Christelis

Rhea Dillon: Janus at Soft Opening, Piccadilly Circus Underground Station, London: Until May 16, 2021

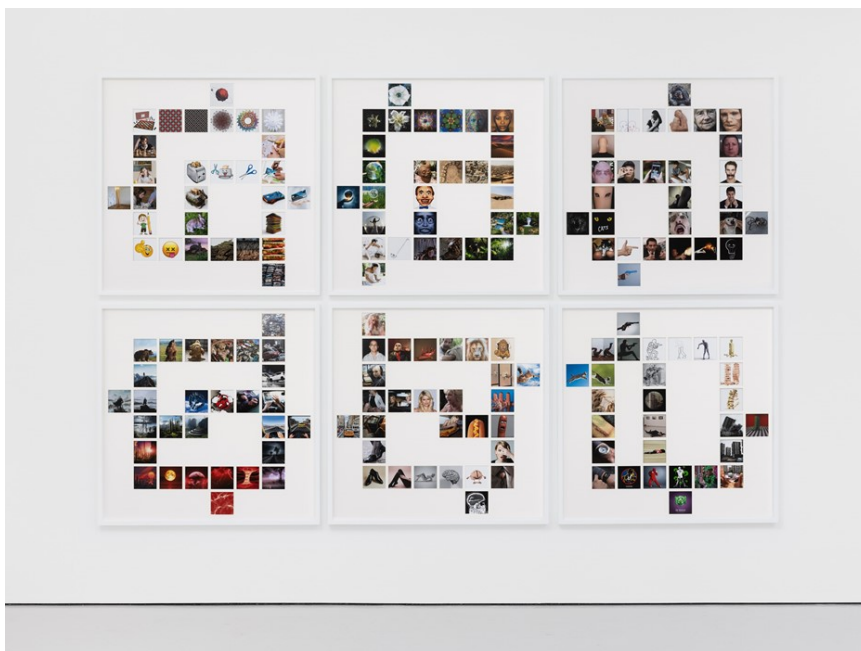
Curator Antonia Marsh's second space within Piccadilly Station holds an installation by Rhea Dillon in the form of a Sapele Mahogany cross. A visionary contemporary thinker, Dillon's "cursed, abstract brain" (the artist's words, not mine) uses mixed media to materialise her ideas. "During lockdown, I've been questioning the Black woman's access to amorphicity," she says. "Thinking through the ideas of the crucifixion and Jesus' shapeshifting; Christianity and colonisation's link." A piece of this kind in such a public space is at once urgent and important.



Sam McKinniss: Country Western Courtesy of Melissa Castro Duarte

Sam McKinniss: Country Western at Broadbent House, Grosvenor Hill, London: Until May 22, 2021

Sam McKinniss's paint strokes are gratuitously naïve, masking the skill of his hand in gorgeously gaudy pop culture depictions. While Dolly Parton, Lil Nas X, Mariah Carey and Elvira are all included in this reverential cast of Country Western icons, Dolly is the real highlight. The painting of her blacked-out eyes beaming as she clutches a kitten is rivalled only by the rendering of her perma-permed mane highlighted with a Day-Glo halo.



Ed Fornieles: Associations Courtesy of Carlos / Ishikawa

Ed Fornieles: Associations at Carlos / Ishikawa, Unit 4, 88 Mile End Road, London: Until May 22, 2021

Following English artist Ed Fornieles' new works feels like falling down a Reddit rabbit hole. Known for his social media, film and performance pieces to express the interaction of social relationships, memes, language and subcultures in the 21st century, the artist's series at *Carlos / Ishikawa* looks at algorithms determining our engagement with images. The exhibition consists of four groups of thumbnails and a film installation which make up a visual snake trail of frames that refer to one another until the first has nothing whatsoever to do with the last - much like getting lost in the internet's algorithms.



DAMIEN HIRST *Self-Portrait as Surgeon*, 2007 - 2008 Oil on canvas,
72 x 54 inches, (182.9 x 137.2 cm) HIRST 2007.0640

GAGOSIAN

Damien Hirst, *Self-Portrait as Surgeon*, 2007 Courtesy of Gagolian

Damien Hirst: Fact Paintings and Fact Sculptures at Gagolian, 6-24 Britannia Street, London: From April 12, 2021

Damien Hirst's oil-on-canvas painting *Self-Portrait as Surgeon* (2007) hits different, post-pandemic. Nonetheless, his works never fail to spark conversation and the show currently on view at Gagolian will undoubtedly serve you with crisper anecdotes than the one I'm currently re-telling about my neighbour's leaking loo. *Snob*, (2006-2020), is particularly relatable (and social-media friendly) - a mixed media piece of a jewellery cabinet, bookended by black bin bags.



Daiga Grantina: Temples at Emalin, 1 Holywell Lane, London: Until May 22, 2021

Emalin's beautiful new space opens with Latvian artist Daiga Grantina's inaugural exhibition. These sculptures are all perfectly imperfect triangles that are pleasing in their geometric tension. Crafted from fabric, wood, paint and plastic, the pieces in *Temples* look like they could be based on things we find in our natural world – but blink twice and you've lost the association, they're imagined forms once again.



Thomas Demand Pond, 2020 C-print/Diasec 200 × 399 cm 78 3/4 × 157 inches
© Thomas Demand, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, 2021. Courtesy Sprüth Magers

Thomas Demand at Sprüth Magers, 7A Grafton St, London: Until May 15, 2021

German artist Thomas Demand has taken up the front, back and upper gallery at Monika Sprüth and Philomena Magers' Mayfair space with new large format photographic works. The latest iteration of his *Model Studies* series shows images from the atelier of Azzedine Alaïa. Blown-up shots of hanging paper patterns show instructions and traces of tape and glue – visual markers of the visionary that worked to create them. The glossy shots are sleek and sharp, well worth the pilgrimage.



An Infinity of Traces Courtesy of Lisson Gallery

An Infinity of Traces at Lisson Gallery, 27-37 Bell St, London: Until June 5, 2021 (lead image)

Curated by Ekow Eshun, this group exhibition features established and emerging UK-based Black artists whose work explores notions of race, history, being, and belonging. The likes of Liz Johnson Artur, Jade Montserrat, Rhea Storr and Sola Olulode address these themes through moving image, sculpture and installation. This show asks the questions: what does resistance to the anti-Black present day look like? What might a decolonial or anti-racist future look like? Can an exhibition be a site of liberation?



Sandra Mujinga: Spectral Keepers, installation view

Sandra Mujinga: Spectral Keepers at The Approach, 1st Floor, Approach Road, London: Until May 1, 2021

Missing nightclubs? Inspired by video games, science-fiction novels and Afrofuturism, Berlin- and Oslo-based artist Sandra Mujinga has flooded the space at The Approach in a hauntingly ethereal green glow. Her 'Keepers' are four hooded sculptures layered in tulle – dystopian incarnations of bouncers, dancers or something altogether more alien. Heightening the apparently hedonistic feel, this show continues the evolution of Mujinga's practice and thoughts about Blackness and the '(in)visibility' of skin tone. The green screen hue exists as camouflage, an augmented reality and a window into the unnatural natural world.

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