

JEL ENA

“SANCTUM INFERNUM”



Decadence Darling
Sas Christian - Samuel D Gliner

Cover: Sanctum Infernum

You are vile and rank, the lowest swine
swimming in filth. Your soul is a cesspool,
your mind warped by perversion but you are
welcome here. I will not offer forgiveness nor a
new soul but there is no sin too great to keep
you from my embrace. Come let us dance.

JEL ENA
“SANCTUM INFERNUM”



Ekphrastic poetry
by Scott Reeves

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Introduction by Sas Christian

I was thrilled when I was asked to write a brief foreword for the catalog of Jel Ena's exhibition "Sanctum Infernum". The title of the exhibition itself fully reflects the spirit of this creative direction as does the venue and date of the opening. Opening at Stephen Romano Gallery on the weekend of Halloween this is both symbolic and meaningful.

Ever since I was at school I've been interested in greek mythology and religion, the concepts of heaven and hell, the cycle of birth, life, death, reward and punishment. In this series of drawings, she takes us on such a journey. Her gothic, dreamlike women and the stories that they tell exude both strength and vulnerability, they shine with emotional and sexual energy.

These magnificent images which evoked the poetry of Scott Reeves, tell a story, not only through composition, but by her use of line and shadow, reflecting the universal language of dreamery. Ribbon like, sinuous lines bring to mind nature's divine curves.

The drawings seem to flow off the paper, dancing with intensity and in them I see the most beautiful forms of Art Nouveau and Japanese woodblock. Jel Ena embraces her mediums of graphite, pastels and acrylic, demonstrating her mastery of technique.

With these drawings, sensitively created and rich with symbolism, Jel Ena invites you into her consciousness, and what a provocative and stunning place that is to be.



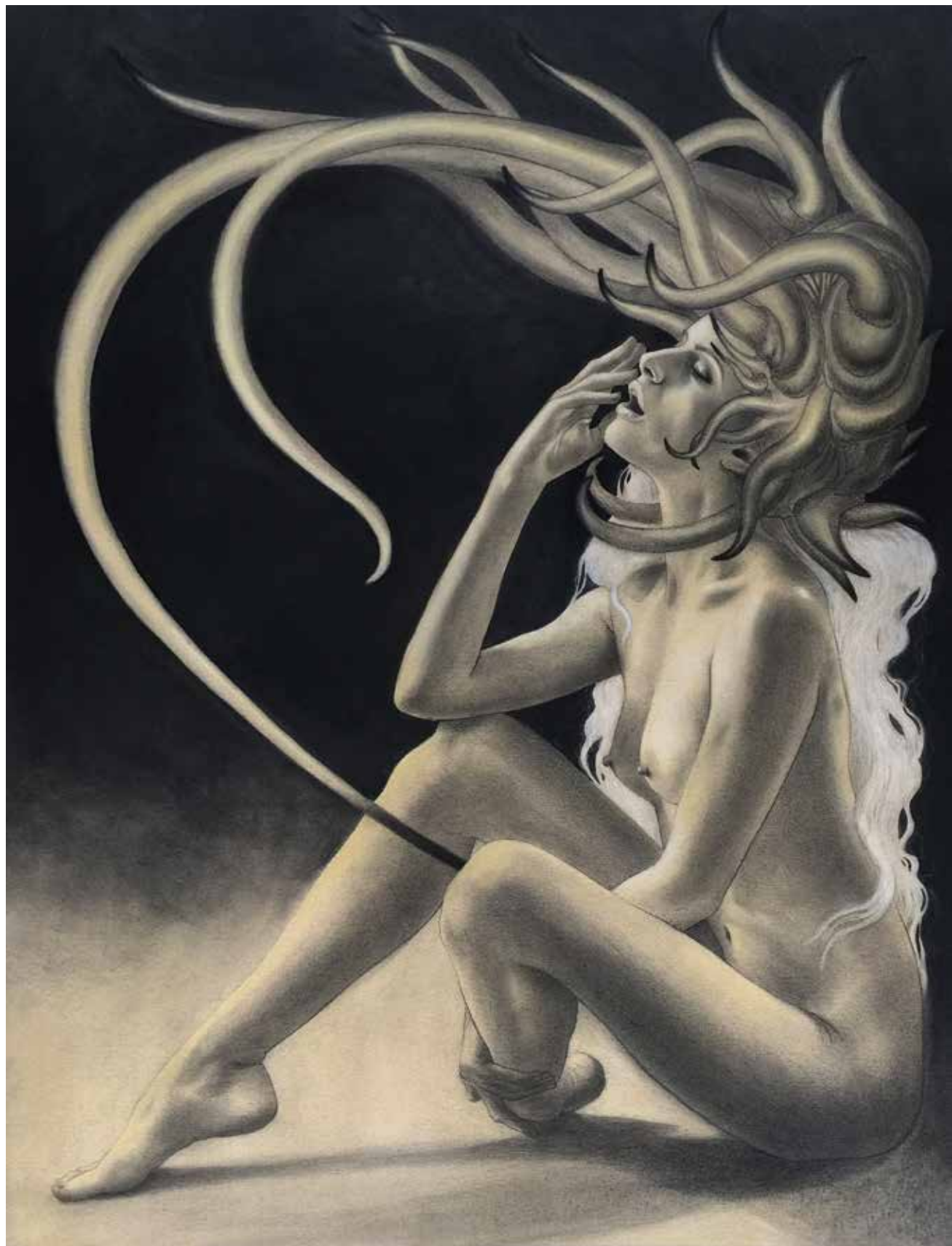
Jel Ena's Gripping Darkness by Samuel D. Gliner

Serbian born and LA-based, Jel Ena (Jelena Markovic) is a classically trained multidisciplinary artist in its truest denotation. Her comprehension of form and anatomy are extraordinarily astute in its understanding and application. Her command of light and shadow, and her ability to fashion a sensual dream-scape is a testament to her refined grasp of the artistic process. Whether utilizing oil or acrylic paints, pastels, graphite, colored pencils, or even in her digital works; Jel Ena's distinctive style is instantaneously recognizable as her own.

For her solo show "Sanctum Infernum" at Stephen Romano Gallery, Jel Ena delves deep into her adoration of folklore and mythos and invokes the complex emotions associated with these legendary archetypes. Opting to work mostly in a colorless palette for the project was an audaciously wise decision. The dark strokes of graphite juxtaposed against the virgin paleness of the canvas invoke a haunting sense of ethereal starkness cloaked in feminine mystique and prowess.. The characters in the drawings are stoic yet emotive, and embody a harmonious narration of balanced dualism; one of gripping darkness and one of hope and light. Though the true magic of the works reside in the expressions and coy glances of her heroines; drawing both on strength and fragility, their eyes and subtle body language silently whisper to the onlooker that there are secrets yet to be unfurled.

Immaculatam Conceptionem

What could be more immaculate
than my own seed? The pleasure
of my flesh. The fruit I bear will be
a twisted image of myself.
A fitting right hand in damnation.



Death is an unknown pleasure. Pleasure is not the addition of something we are without, it is the realization of something that is within. It is through “death” that we awaken this inherent pleasure. When we seek pleasure, small or large, we examine ourselves accordingly. We take inventory, observe patterns, evaluate and assess strengths and weaknesses. Through all of this we judge ourselves. We determine how much of this information we accept or reject. In other words, seeking pleasure is a process of positive acceptance and negative rejection. But what if those things we are adverse to are a part of who we truly are? To dispose of them would make us incomplete. Perhaps in this pursuit of Self we deny our fullness and the thing we wished we were is an empty object full of pain.

Withdrawing from external gratifications is the first step in redefining pain and gaining truth. Anyone who bases pleasure on what is external to themselves would consider such withdraw as painful. This is the womb of melancholy where pain cultivates truth. This is the melancholy gifted to spiritual ascetics. It is this shade of melancholy that resonates through Jel Ena’s Sanctum Infernum.

Pleasure and pain are channeled through the concepts of the sacred (Sanctum) and the profane (Infernum). The sacred and profane are the measurements that we utilize to evaluate our identity and our desires. And unlike the concept of heaven and hell as being isolated spaces strictly divided, the sacred and profane work on a spectrum. But as Jel Ena reveals in Sanctum Infernum, this spectrum is not linear so much as it is circular. As the artist explains,

It’s a dichotomy of terms; contradiction that is present in all of us, the conflict, and our never ending effort to balance them out. As much as they are contradicting they cannot exist without each other. Just like light cannot exist without darkness, heaven without hell, sacred without profane/infernal.

In the drawing Sanctum Infernum, the woman’s power issues from her head like smoke bellowing from Hell, within which contains the corpse of a deer and dead flowers. Decaying flora and fauna show a process of exiting the light of life and entering the darkness of death. Being intertwined with the decay symbolizes her acceptance of the profane. Death is no more static than life. Death is transformation, breaking down old forms to manifests new forms. Life and death is a cyclic process generating the sacred and profane.

The darkness coming from her head descends upon her, but her power is not whimsical. Her will is concentrated in the form of the horns that protrude from her head. Within this explosion of darkness there appears to be a vulnerability in her stillness. It is the case with all the women in the series. They have not quite assumed their infernal identity. Pleasure is a labor as they struggle with accepting their darkness.

These women are coming from darkness, an infernal place, but they are discovering how strong and powerful they actually are.

The women, who are if not nude, are naked of commitment to the pleasures of the world. These women are powerful, but their power is not displayed in the mood of aggression or dominance. Their power is not stoic, but rather issues from their bodies like a heavy exhalation as tears fill the eyes so that the vision of the world is seen in the texture of their emotions.

In *Requiem Aeternam* a man holds his arm around a woman's form as his hand grips her chest. Her eyes are in a dead stare, her hands making no effort to resist. Her only motion is that of her body falling to the side allowing her natural force of gravity to counter his egotistical will. He can't give her the pleasure she is seeking.

This man is no different from any possible object outside of the woman that could be portrayed in the drawing. He is irrelevant, therefore atmosphere is irrelevant, almost irrelevant. Light and darkness are the only significant ambient details as they complement the emotional context within the subject that cannot be realistically drawn. There is no organic atmosphere, and yet everything is naturalistic. The form of the woman does not become enveloped in darkness, rather she becomes enlightened. It is her greatest darkness that illuminates her greatest light.

Their forms are in some way idealized on purpose in order to juxtapose overall dark and grotesque mood. Their bodies are an epitome of light existing amidst the darkness.

Immaculatam Conceptionem explores this connection of power and pleasure through the masturbatory act where the woman's own horns creates a sort of Ouroboros of pleasure. The energy that comes from the lowest parts of the body ascends and culminates into a degree of concentrated power that takes the form of horns. But this is not a narrative of

transcendence where that power would continue directing upward to the heavens and connect with the Divine. Instead, the horns are directed downward and are invested back to the lower chakra where that energy is released, only to eventually rise back up creating a cyclic continuum of the sacred and profane.

Despite this image of completion this woman is alone. All of these women are alone. Even in *Salve Me*, surrender appears to come down with closed eyes. Clothes fall open, exposing both breasts of the upper woman. Her hand gently touches the other woman, but does not grip. It is this uncertainty that is throughout the series. Each form is open but hesitant by guarding their core by an arm across their chest, or a back turned, or a body lying on the floor or falling to the ground.

It is their environment, it is the negative and positive energies, feelings, emotions they are battling to balance out. I don't believe in surrender.

The paradox of the isolated death in which these women exude power is that the darkness in which they have empowered themselves requires them to project their power. Because darkness and death are cyclical it is inevitable that as much as these women stand empowered in the profane, they must also be empowered within the sacred. The counterpoint of pleasure is sacrifice. Whereas pleasure seemingly intakes, sacrifice projects. But sacrifice is another death experience, and it is through death that one again achieves pleasure.

Sacrifice is the coalescence of the sacred and profane, but it requires acceptance of oneself in order to sacrifice that thing. We cannot give what we do not have—and what are we to give that someone does not inherently have within them? This is the mystery in sacrifice and surrender. In *Stigmata* the woman lies down, she does not stand. It appears that she is not situated in her power. She is gazing upon a skull of another. Reaching out and meditating on the skull, upon which two wounded Luzon doves are perched, implies her struggle to find salvation outside of herself. The mystery of *stigmata* is that through one's salvation they become the sacrificed. Even if connected to the Divine it is in isolation that we experience redemption. This is not the only story of sacrifice in the series.

The drawing *Medea* depicts the classical story of Medea who sacrificed her own children to spite Jason for his betrayal. Unlike *Stigmata* where the woman struggles with salvation by adding something from outside of herself, Medea has subtracted something external to herself. She does not depend on another to receive what is already hers. She stands frontal, however, her shoulder blocks us from fully receiving her form. Though she has liberated

herself she carries a burden that anchors her to one moment in time, thus continuing with the circular model of the sacred and profane being the seeds of each other's manifestation.

Death, darkness, isolation, sacrifice, and the infernal are the things we generally fear, but these very elements can be the ingredients to our greatest power. In isolation we can separate our true self from misidentifying with illusion. In darkness we can find hidden strengths. In sacrifice we embrace what cannot be given or taken. In death we transform. In the infernal we find empowerment. Sanctum Infernum is not a perversion of the sacred, nor does it define pleasure as base pleasures easily obtained by the removal of moral or ethical barriers. Sanctum Infernum is the pleasure that is discovered when all pleasure has died. It is through the death of pleasure that one becomes satisfied. Pleasure is the sacred, the unknown is the profane, and death is the ring upon which they continuously spin. The pain we once feared is the very key that unlocks an equal pleasure, and our sense of empowerment. Rather than our lives being a reaction to an inevitable death, we can take actions that uses death as an instrument of illumination in our life.



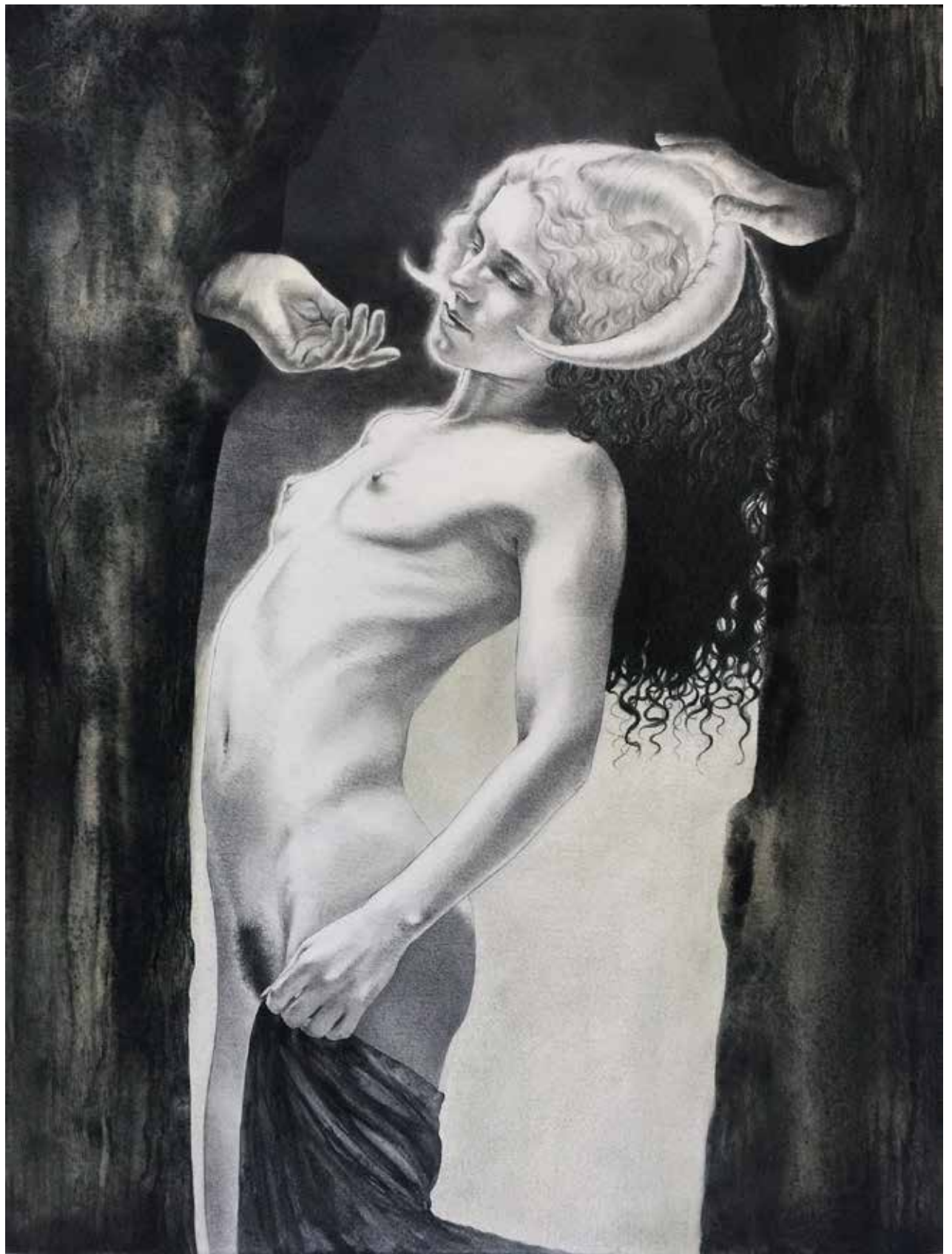
Lubido

Oh desire, you eternal prick of the tongue.
I am the wild in the wood, the howl of life
rampant, the rot creeping under bellies.
I am the flame that is only pain without warmth,
the common thread unraveling, the fleeting
pleasure. Do you believe in judgement day?



Lux ab Intus

It's a love song, the way the needles
of my fingers hold you, this red thread
that pulls through the glint. It is fire and
blood and it scars us both. I only know hunger
and the lies I need to feed it. This mouth is raw
with prayers. I will consume you but first
you will know pleasure.



Medea

You are born of pain, a hungry wound sucking.
Blood red and desperate, your banshee wail
only knows need. I suckle you with poison and ash
so you will rise in flames.
What have I done to deserve this gift? So much.



Praevideat

Tell me what ghosts you are waiting for,
how the roots of your feet drag through the past.
How you are lost in purpose. There is no mercy
but I can free you of this moment and teach your
heart to burn.



Requiem Aeternam

You would paint me with the fear you hold.
That tool that you think you are clever enough to
use, clamped in your monkey paws is useless
against me. It is a cross, it is a blade, either way
I have no heart for you to find. You would do well
to pierce your own chest, you might yet save your soul.



Carpe Diem

I sing to you mortals, lyrics of flame and promises of pain. Come unto me on steps washed of silence. The muffled cries of ecstasy, the low hum of prayer. No matter how many times you play the penitent there is nothing to ease the pain.

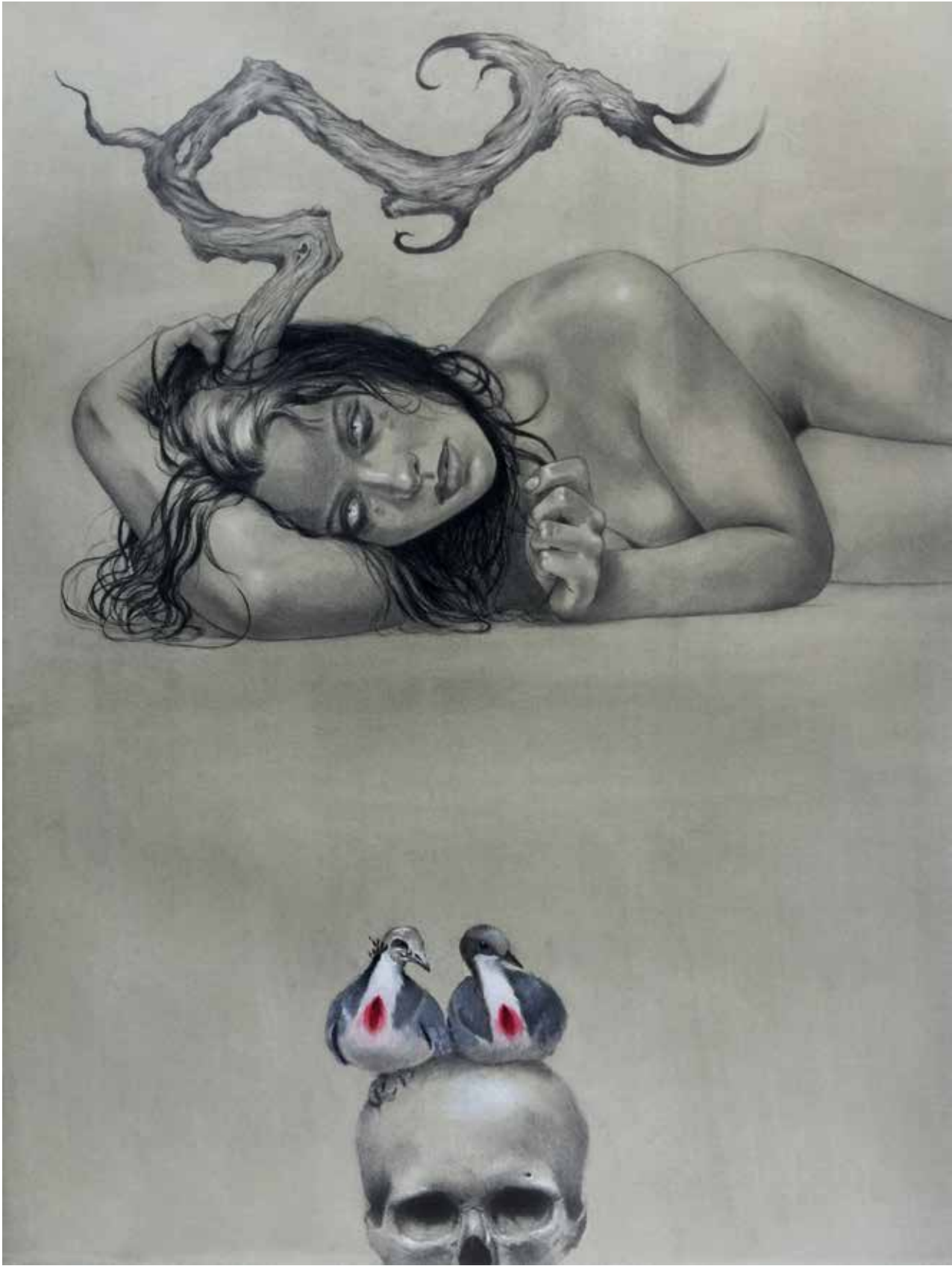


Stigmata

I can not help but put my fingers
into the heart of what adores me,
to feel the small life give itself to me.

You are so indomitable in your ignorance,
too bad you never convinced yourself of your beliefs.

Can you feel the rapture coming? These spasms
of devastation. Scream into me, fill me with your fear.
Such a pleasant little hum.



Salve me, fons pietatis

You are already dead, rotting under a tree, your bones have settled. Now you are food for the earth. All you did in life was take, your corpse is a small remuneration. I will inhabit your bones as I inhabited your soul.



Acknowledgements

Jel Ena would like to thank Stephen Romano for providing inspiration and extraordinary support in creating the body of work for this show. Scott Reeves for generously contributing his ekphrastic poetry, Decadence Darling for his remarkable essay, as well as Sas Christian and Samuel D. Gliner for their thoughtful introductions.

Stephen Romano Gallery wishes to thank Jel Ena for the abundance of faith and support she has shown toward the gallery. Thank you also to Decadence Darling, Sas Christian, Samuel D. Gliner, J. Kevin O'Rourke, John Foster and the amazing Amie Romano.

Published by Stephen Romano Gallery Brooklyn NY USA on the occasion of:

Jel Ena "Sanctum Infernum" October 29 - December 15 2015

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Contributors

Decadence Darling explores the esoteric elements of chaos, death, and transformation in art, philosophy, and society as a means to redefine our understanding of darkness. Through written word and conducting interviews with artists such as Kazuhiro Tsuji and El Gato Chimney his work has been published online and in literature in Beautiful Bizarre Magazine, as well as his personal blog, "Manifesto of Decadence".

Sas Christian is a London born artist now residing in Florida and member of the Pop Surrealist Art Movement. Sas has shown internationally at galleries and museums.

Scott Reeves is a poet and photographer wandering somewhere in the desert southwest. He has shown work in USA and Europe. He regularly publishes work on his personal blog missinglight.tumblr.com.

Samuel D. Gliner is a Ukraine born and Brooklyn raised writer, artist, and designer with a penchant for photography, obscurity, and antiquity. Whether through personal works or as the founder of the art and culture collective, Between Mirrors, he is devoted to the progression of freethinking and the creative process.

All of the artwork in this show are executed in graphite, charcoal, pastel, and acrylic wash on hand toned Fabriano Artistico Hot Press paper (300lb / 640 grms) mounted on cradled wood panel.

All photography of artworks by Jel Ena for Stephen Romano Gallery.

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