
spiaggia libera

Gaby Sahhar

Gaby Sahhar (Royaume-Uni) born in 1992



Gaby Sahhar

Gaby Sahhar is a Franco-Palestinian artist based between London and Paris. Their work combines painting, film, and installation. Sahhar's art deconstructs the queer representation of public spheres to understand its broader effects on consciousness and queer communities. By drawing on language and vulnerability as tools, their work aims to create conversations around accessibility, residency, and interconnectivity within urban cultures. They employ speculative storytelling to highlight the various ways psychological and physical frameworks fragment Palestinian identity.

Their work has been exhibited at MAC VAL, Paris / The Kooples Art Prize (2023); PAGE (NYC), New York (2022); SPACE Artist Award (2022) and in group exhibitions at Fragment Gallery, New York (2022); Sadie Coles HQ, London (2022); Whitechapel Gallery (2022); and South London Gallery (2020).

Education

2015 BA Fine Art, Goldsmiths, London

Residencies and Awards

2024 Cité International Des Arts, Paris
 2022 Kooples Art Award
 2021 SPACE, Artist Award
 2020 Arts Council England, DYCP
 2019 Almanac Projects, Turin, Italy
 2015 Crossway Foundation / Art Jameel, Tokyo

Solo and Duo Exhibitions

2024 spiaggia libera, Paris
 2023 Art O Rama, Marseille
 2023 Whitechapel Gallery, Escape the Slick with Duchamp and Sons
 2023 MAC VAL Paris (Forthcoming)
 2022 Kooples Art Award - Champs-Élysées
 2022 PAGE NYC
 2021 Inner City Pressure, SPACE Ilford
 2019 Second Home, Sweetwater, Berlin
 2019 Almanac Projects, Turin, Italy
 2018 I am, PlayCo, London
 2017 Totally Different Animals (with Rosie Grace Ward), Arcadia Missa, London
 2016 Upgrade me, Tesco Extra, London

Group Exhibitions

2024 Magasin Généraux, Paris
 2023 Sultana, Arles
 2023 Mammoth, London
 2022 Restaurant Projects NYC
 2022 SPACE Artist Award, Ilford
 2022 Sadie Coles HQ The Shop — Queerdirect

Group show

2021 *HESTIA*, 55bis, Inner City Pressure, Paris
 2020 *MIXED // VARIOUS // UNTITLED* curated by Mohamed Almusibli, Truth and Kinship
 2020 *VII Moscow International Biennale for Young Art*, Museum of Moscow, Crime in Progress
 2020 La Casa Encendida, Madrid
 2020 *Burn Out*, Freud Museum, London
 2020 *Working Progress*, South London Gallery, London
 2020 *GENDERS*, science Gallery, London
 2018 *ArtWorks Open*, Barbican Arts Group Trust, London
 2017 *The Night Holds its Breath*, Penarth Center, London
 2017 *Everyone is Now Rich Apparently*, Arcadia Missa NY, New York
 2016 *Encounters*, Galleri Mejan, Stockholm

When language fails, bodies talk 05.10 → 16.11

British artist of Palestinian and French origin, Gaby Sahhar explores themes related to the notion of borders, political geographies, gender identities, and sexuality in their paintings, sculptures, and installations. Drawing on speculative fiction, science fiction, and reflections on transit sites in Western metropolises, they weave narratives aimed at deconstructing the power dynamics imposed on marginalized communities, particularly queer ones, by focusing on intersectionality and the potential encounters between different activist practices.

In his essay *What is a Border?* (1994), philosopher Etienne Balibar mentions three key aspects of the ambiguity of borders inherited from colonial empires and the concept of the nation-state: their overdetermination, polysemy, and heterogeneity. The issue of borders, whether political, colonial, or imaginary, is thus at the heart of Gaby Sahhar's practice. The queer body can also be seen as both an intimate and public border — once bodies are liberated, borders will be too. As writer and scholar Paul B. Preciado often expresses, the body is a true «living political archive,» and its stigmas reflect the events and traumas of the time we live in. Inspired by the architectural politics revealed in the construction of borders — recognizable by their steel structures and metal cubes — Gaby Sahhar evokes in their paintings an environment of fragmented landscapes, a border-like division of walls and gates, perhaps those that have enclosed Palestinian territories since 2002. Gaby Sahhar's latest series of paintings presents a psychedelic aesthetic with green, red, and black tones, further evoking the colors of the Palestinian, French, and British flags. A set of eight sculptures punctuates the exhibition, made from Palestinian Medjool date boxes. All are adorned with elements related to the notion of borders, standing as vernacular remnants of how Palestinian culture has managed to cross borders into Western Europe.

It is precisely the forbidden architectures and blurred peripheries of borders— hostile and violent environments often arranged by colonial powers—that seem to fascinate the artist, whose works reflect in their own way the theories of the Forensic Architecture movement (Border Forensic), a multidisciplinary research group based in London using architectural techniques and technologies to investigate cases of state violence and human rights violations worldwide. The titles of Gaby Sahhar's works seem to come straight from a border identity check, questioning the deprivation of our rights in these moments of power and humiliation: *Passport Please*, *Enforcement Shoe*, *Suspicious Item*, etc. It is, moreover, the fantasy of these borders that they have not known and cannot visit that gives their paintings their somewhat unsettling semi-fictional aspect.

One of the artist's tutelary figures is Pierre Molinier, a painter and photographer from the early last century, whose life and work are filled with dark fantasies and sensational anecdotes. His photographs of fetishized bodies remain captivating today. Although inspired by Surrealism, Molinier remained on the fringes of the movement. His self-portrait technique, to which Gaby Sahhar refers, involved photographing himself crossdressed and made up, then cutting and reassembling the images to create a collage — an idealized vision of himself. Gaby Sahhar's paintings depict androgynous creatures, part-robotic and part-fetish, with hidden faces, proposing an alternative existence to heterosexual conventions. Not only complex in their technique and subject matter, their figures, like those of Molinier, challenge traditional ideas of power, domination, and gender fluidity. Icons of a post-gender era and a pioneer of queer culture, Molinier left behind a space for young artists like Gaby Sahhar to imagine new visual and political possibilities. Like other painters to whom the artist echoes, Molinier explores the fragmentation of the human body, shattering its contours to reveal a new vision. This transgressive and deeply symbolic deconstruction reflects the fragmentation of borders in a world at war, where perhaps only fragmented bodies can still be represented. When language fails, bodies talk.

Lastly, it is the nightlife world that inspires Gaby Sahhar's deconstructed aesthetic of club culture — sometimes a bit dark and often speckled with flashes of light, halfway between the depths of dark wave and the sparkle of disco. Having spent their teenage years in South London in the 2000s, frequenting many clubs, they convey in their work the idea of the dancefloor as a meeting place and a space of resistance that can break down borders between people. The same desire for resistance and transgression applies to the central work of the exhibition, *Syntax*, a vast mural created from the archives of the LGBTQIA+ Center in New York. This painting revisits iconic photographs from the Pier district of the late 1970s. Each character coexists in a fictional, location-free setting. Presented in the last room of the gallery, this mural is accompanied by a sound installation created in collaboration with Owen Pratt, perhaps the soundtrack of these transitional spaces that Gaby Sahhar conjures in these paintings.

Throughout their practice, the artist extends the metaphor of the club as an ephemeral model of living together and an open space for dreaming of social, sexual, and racial freedom. Perhaps, in fact, the only space where one can forget and be forgotten, and dance the pain away.

-- Martha Kirszenbaum

Communication

Communication © Thomas Petit et Manon Bruet

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75003 Paris

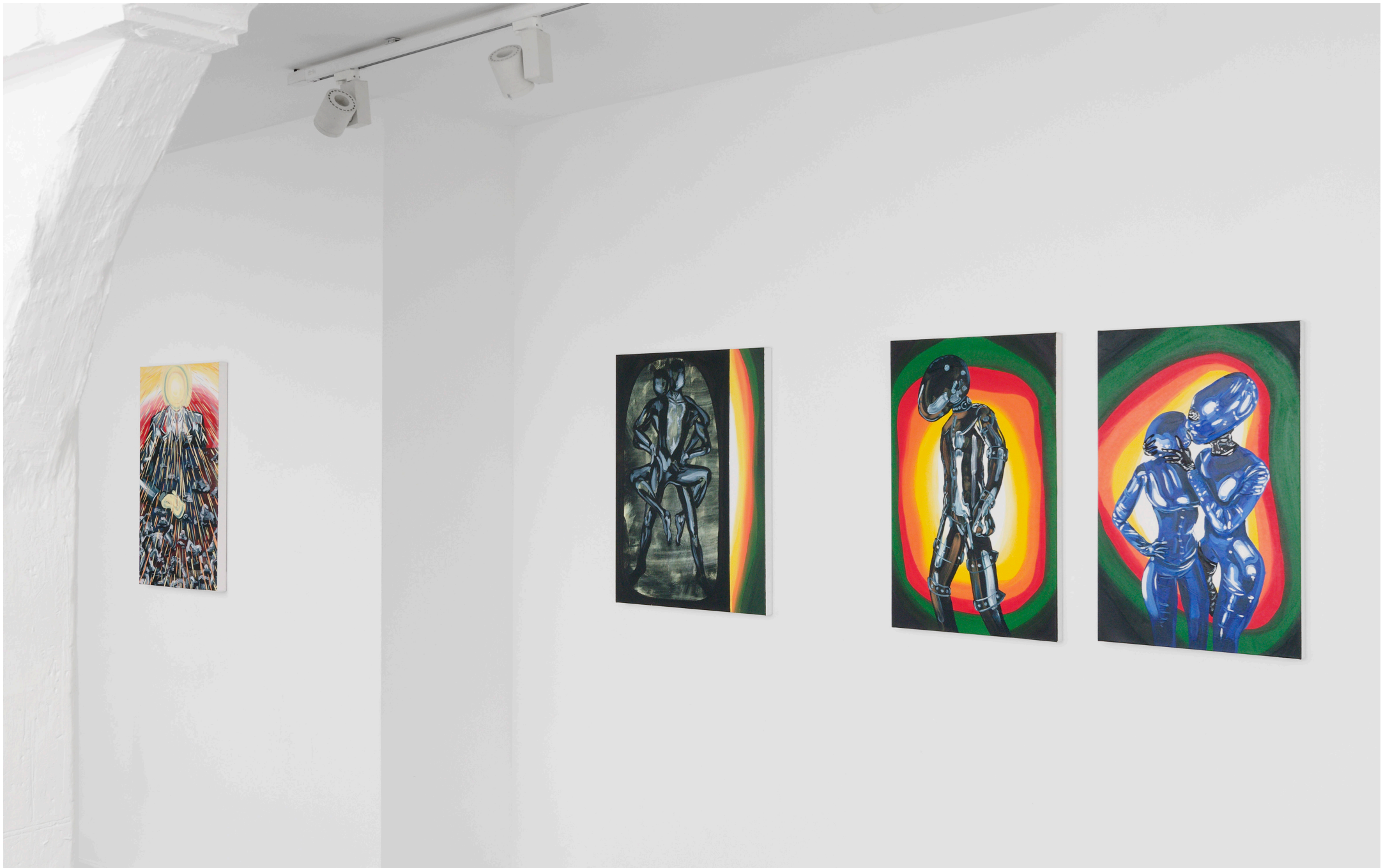
Exhibition view

« When language fails, bodies talk », spiaggia libera, Paris, 2024.



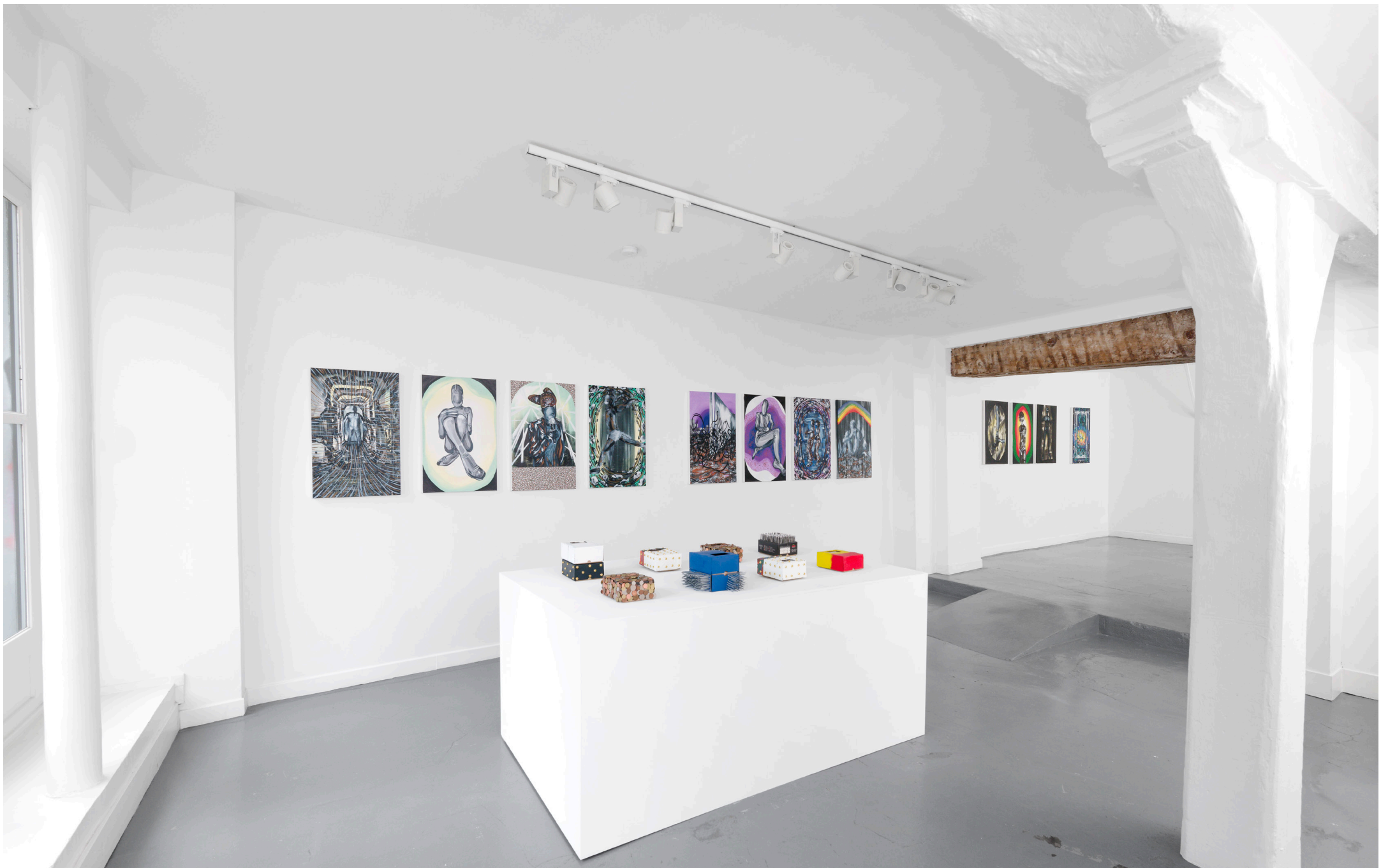
Exhibition view

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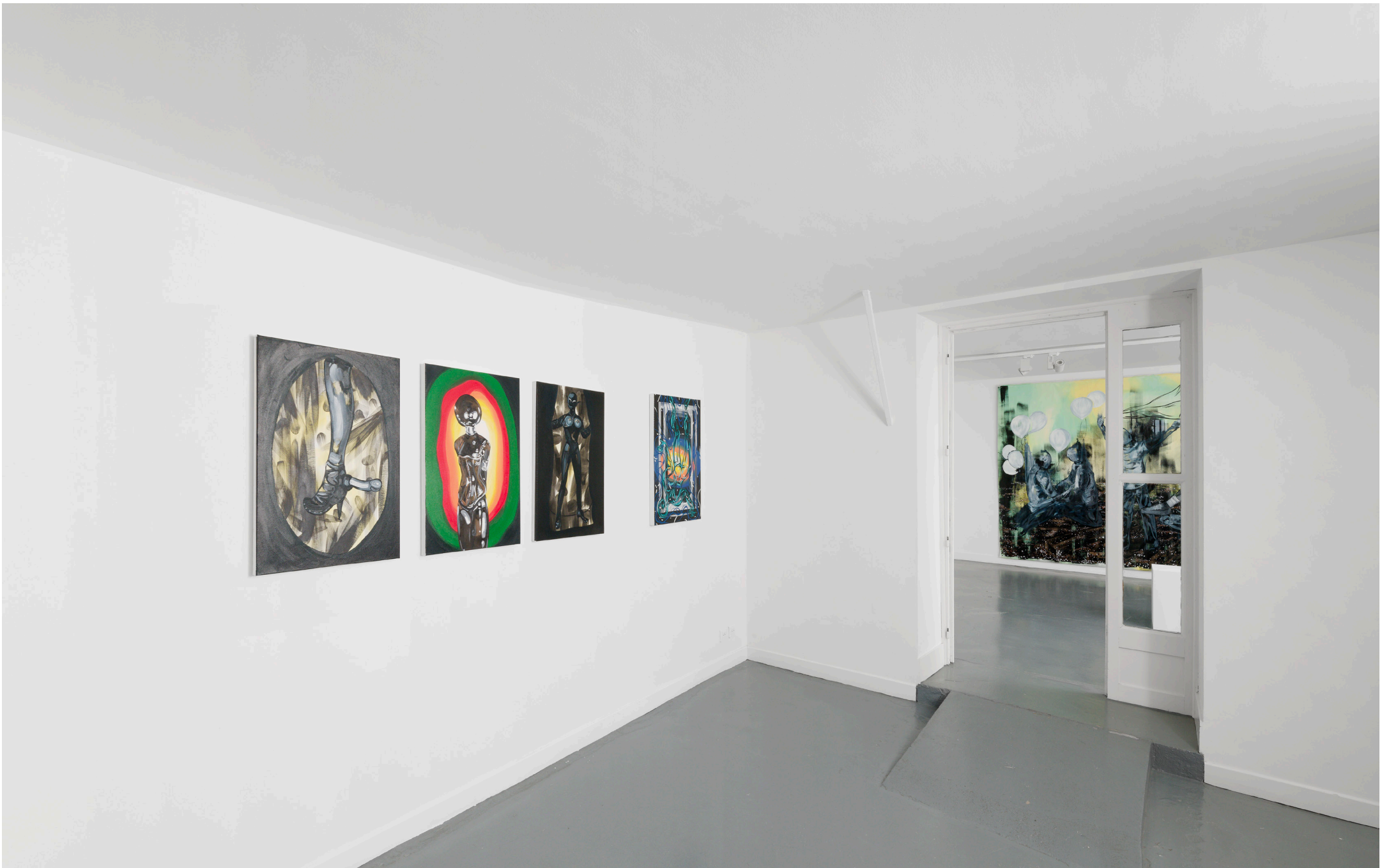
Exhibition view

« When language fails, bodies talk », spiaggia libera, Paris, 2024.



Exhibition view

« When language fails, bodies talk », spiaggia libera, Paris, 2024.



Exhibition view

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Selection of Works

Artworks

Invisible world, 2024, oil on linen, 440 × 220 cm.

Courtesy the artist & spiaggia libera, Paris. © Aurelien Mole



Artworks

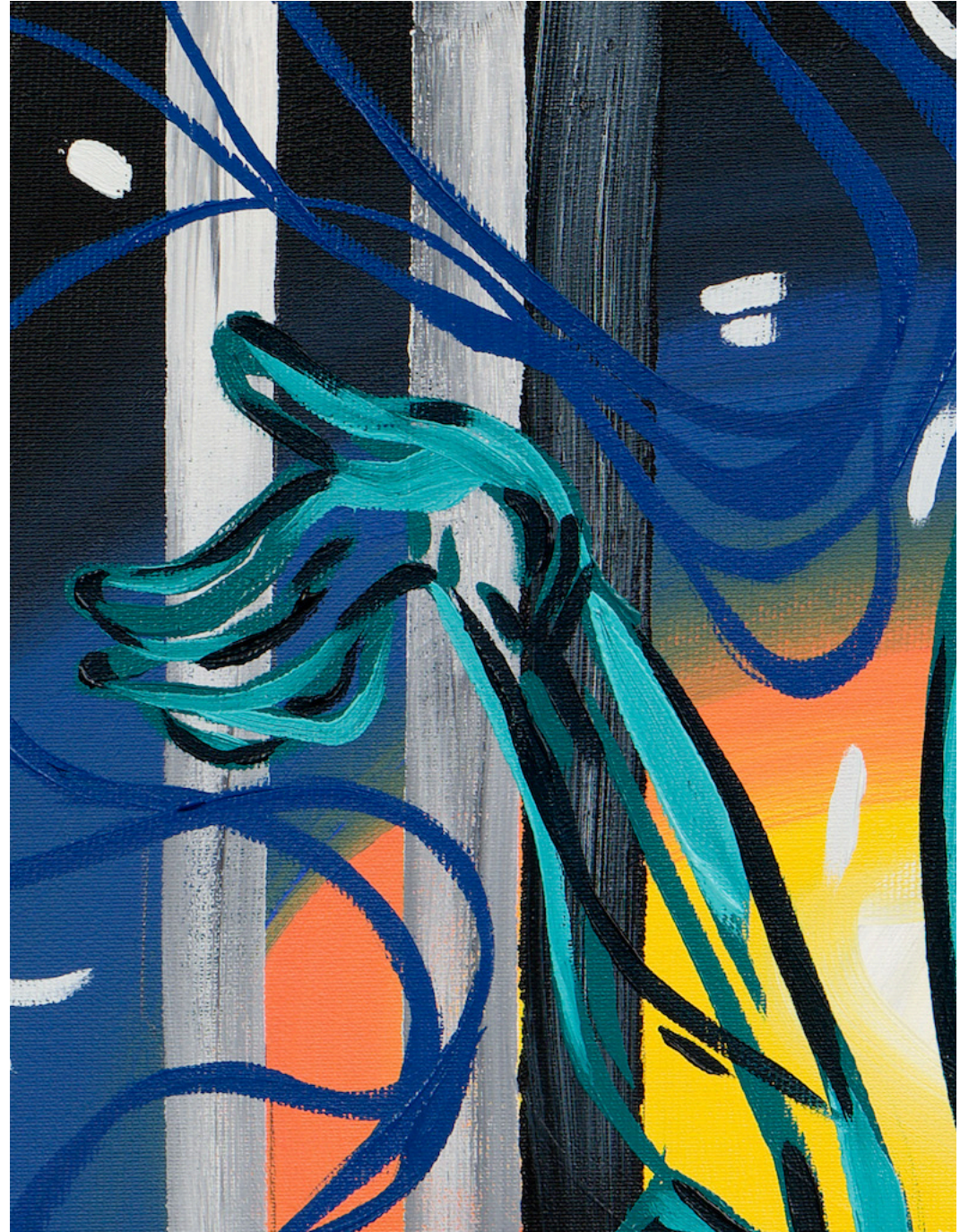
Act of Violence, 2024, oil on linen, 75 x 45 cm.
Courtesy the artist & spiaggia libera, Paris. © Aurelien Mole

Another Nowhere, 2024, Huile sur lin. 75 x 45 cm.
Courtesy the artist & spiaggia libera, Paris. © Aurelien Mole



Artworks

Where borders begin, 2024, oil on linen, 75 x 45 cm.
Courtesy the artist & spiaggia libera, Paris. © Aurelien Mole



Artworks

Untitled, 2024, oil on linen, 75 x 45 cm.
Courtesy the artist & spiaggia libera, Paris. © Aurelien Mole

The Impossible, 2024, oil on linen, 75 x 45 cm.
Courtesy the artist & spiaggia libera, Paris. © Aurelien Mole



Artworks

Enforced shoe, 2024, oil on linen, 75 x 45 cm.
Courtesy the artist & spiaggia libera, Paris. © Aurelien Mole



Artworks

Untitled, 2024, oil on linen, 75 x 45 cm.
Courtesy the artist & spiaggia libera, Paris. © Aurelien Mole

The Search for Truth, 2024, oil on linen, 75 x 45 cm.
Courtesy the artist & spiaggia libera, Paris. © Aurelien Mole



Artworks

Distorted, 2024, oil on linen, 75 x 45 cm.
Courtesy the artist & spiaggia libera, Paris. © Aurelien Mole



Artworks

Wall, 2024, oil on linen, 75 x 45 cm.
Courtesy the artist & spiaggia libera, Paris. © Aurelien Mole

Concrete Jump, 2024, oil on linen, 75 x 45 cm.
Courtesy the artist & spiaggia libera, Paris. © Aurelien Mole



Artworks

The Activist, 2024, oil on linen, 75 x 45 cm.

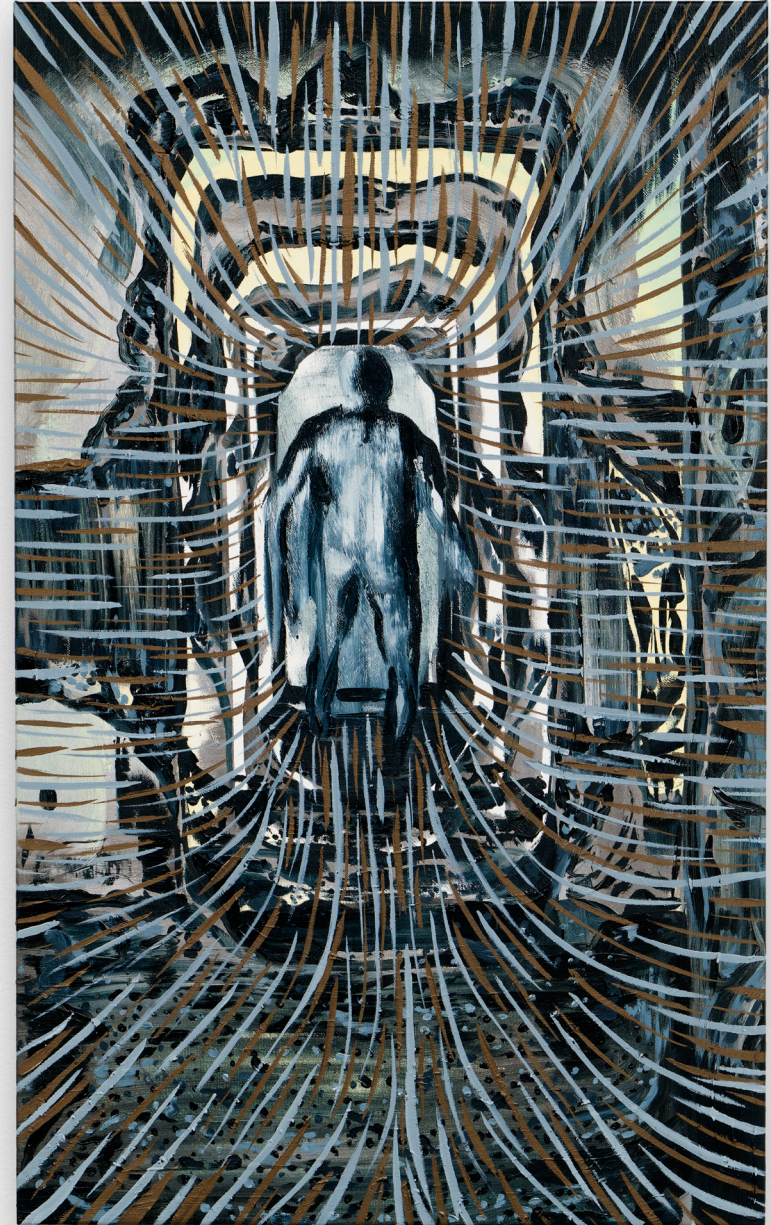
Courtesy the artist & spiaggia libera, Paris. © Aurelien Mole



Artworks

Untitled light, 2024, oil on linen, 75 x 45 cm.
Courtesy the artist & spiaggia libera, Paris. © Aurelien Mole

Territory, 2024, oil on linen, 75 x 45 cm.
Courtesy the artist & spiaggia libera, Paris. © Aurelien Mole



Artworks

Man at sea, 2024, oil on linen, 75 x 45 cm.

Courtesy the artist & spiaggia libera, Paris. © Aurelien Mole



Artworks

The Beyond, 2024, oil on linen, 75 x 45 cm.
Courtesy the artist & spiaggia libera, Paris. © Aurelien Mole

Passport Please, 2024, oil on linen, 75 x 45 cm.
Courtesy the artist & spiaggia libera, Paris. © Aurelien Mole



Artworks

Untitled, 2024, oil on linen, 74 x 100 cm.
Courtesy the artist & spiaggia libera, Paris. © Aurelien Mole



Artworks

Compressed memories, 2024, oil on linen, 75 x 55 cm.
Courtesy the artist & spiaggia libera, Paris. © Aurelien Mole



Artworks

Untitled, 2024, oil, pieces, pins, nails, 19 x 15 x 12 cm.
Courtesy the artist & spiaggia libera, Paris. © Aurelien Mole



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