

## Press Release

**Sadaf H Nava**  
**Vanity**  
**Ornamental Madness in the Shadow of a Dionysian Mask**

**2 September – 21 October 2023**  
**Opening 1 September , 6 – 8 pm**

*"The Form is spatially separate and then the Idea is reflected in matter as if in water, but that matter, from every side touching (and again not touching) the Idea, receives from the Form, over the whole of itself, by its drawing near to it all that it can receive, with nothing in between"*

*(vi.5.8.16-21) Plotinus, The Enneads*

*"The soul, like Dionysus gazes at an image of itself in the mirror; it is attracted or seduced by what it sees and this attraction sets off the entire process...in order to become embodied, the soul moves spontaneously in pursuit of what is actually an image of itself and there are no external factors determining this movement"*

*(646) Panayiota Vassilopoulou, The Gaze in the Mirror*

In her first solo exhibition presented by Karma International, Sadaf H Nava endeavors to explore the concept of the Dionysian Mirror as an embodiment of the unconscious self. In the Enneads, a youthful Dionysus is gifted a mirror as a means of seduction away from his duties as ruler. He is subsequently torn to pieces, cooked and eaten by the Titans. Due to Athena's intervention, Dionysus's heart is saved and used by Zeus in order to resurrect him once again.

Much like the disembodied and reconstructed Dionysus, the broken mirror pieces present throughout the exhibition reflect the viewer back onto her/himself. In contrast to the self-admiring disposition of Narcissus, Dionysus probes mimicry's role as a conduit for self-portraiture. By inserting the viewer within the work, the Dionysian mirror creates a multitude of personas as a means of distancing the self from itself, ultimately transforming the mirror into a stage...one that is ripe for the birth of tragedy.

Furthermore, Nava's exhibition propels its focus towards the female adherents of Bacchic rituals, traditionally referred to as the Maenads, a term signifying "The Raving Ones". This assemblage of women includes the esteemed priestess Paculla Annia, who held authority over the mystery cults and Holy Orgia during the 2nd Century BC in ancient Rome. The exhibition strives to establish a nexus between these historical narratives and their contemporary resonance within the realm of the performative arts, drawing particular inspiration from the happenings of the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the persistent reverberation of Dionysian motifs within contemporary DJ/Rave culture.

While visual markers connected to these themes are evident in the artwork presented, what truly defines the work as "Dionysian" lies in its performative construction. In other words, the show's treatment of the Dionysian theme primarily manifests itself through its methodology rather than its subject matter. The creation of paintings adopts an anti-craft approach, embracing multidisciplinary elements, improvisation, and layering. In its imagery, the female figure undergoes various transformations, morphing into abstracted forms as well as symbolically loaded glass coca-cola bottles and Anthurium bouquets, ultimately blurring the line between inward looking affect and its external reflection.