

Paulina Olowka: *Squelchy Garden Mules and Mamunas*

22 November 2023 – 6 January 2024

Pace Gallery

5 Hanover Square

Opening Reception: Tuesday 21 November, 6-8pm



Paulina Olowka, *Dziewannas (After Branislav Šimončík)*, 2023, oil on canvas, 310 cm × 210 cm
© Paulina Olowka, courtesy Pace Gallery

London – Pace is pleased to announce *Squelchy Garden Mules and Mamunas*, on view from November 22, 2023 to January 6, 2024. Marking Paulina Olowka's debut exhibition with Pace since joining the gallery's programme in 2022, the artist will showcase a suite of paintings, collages, film, and sound installation across the entirety of Pace's Hanover Square gallery. Centring female perspectives and narratives, Olowka's presentation will develop her explorations into Slavic folklore, mythology, and the collective capabilities of, and our intrinsic connection to, nature.

Titled after Olowka's eponymous video installation, first included in the artist's 2022 exhibition at Kistefos Museum in Norway, *Squelchy Garden Mules and Mamunas* reimagines Slavic mythological deities and demons in new modernist lights. The Mamuna, literally translated from Polish as *strangewife*, is a female swamp demon closely associated with rivers, streams, and thickets. Historically characterised as menacing, Olowka portrays her Mamunas as earthly androgynous nymphs, more magical than malicious.

Large-scale paintings, each titled after deities from the Slavic pantheon, feature Olowka's Mamuna-muses gathered amongst the birch and pine forests of northern Europe. By using photography as the basis for her compositions, the artist subverts mass media and fine art to recover female figures from their mythological pasts. In these paintings, women commune with their surroundings, with themselves, and with the viewer.

Throughout the upper two galleries of the exhibition, Mamunas peer out from a video installation nestled within five woodland hollows. Suggestive of Black Forest cuckoo clocks, the frames feature carved woodland creatures—including bears, foxes, owls, squirrels, and deer. *Kadenówka Bouquet* (2023), a framed painting in the exhibition, is based on an image taken at the Kadenówka in Rabka, home to Artist House Kadenowka Foundation, established by Ołowska in 2019. Designed in 1932 by Adam Kaden, Kadenówka has been home to a health spa, tailoring school, hospital accommodation, and is now run by Ołowska as an artistic and cultural retreat, hosting meetings, lectures, exhibitions, and performances on the subject of sacred knowledge.

Further complicating notions of interior and exterior, two ornate chandeliers will feature in the show. Working in collaboration with the artist Jessica Segall as a continuation of Segall's Nom Nom Ohm series, Ołowska's chandeliers uncover the wisdom and the intelligence of the forest. Bedecked with ceramic and handblown glass mushrooms, pinecones, fruits, vegetables, and potatoes, the chandeliers reproduce the reciprocal systems and inter-species networks of communication that structure woods and forests. Research on fungi suggests they can generate electrical signals through their mycelial webs: Ołowska symbolically harnesses this energy to charge her chandeliers and illuminate the exhibition.

In the lower ground floor gallery, Ołowska will stage puppets wearing the costumes from her Kistefos performance. The puppets take equal inspiration from Ukrainian Motanka—knotted guardian dolls, made without needle or scissors—and the Polish spring ritual Topienie Marzanny, during which straw Marzanna dolls representing death, winter, and disease, are drowned in the river. Arranged in compositional motifs mirroring those found in the artist's paintings for the exhibition, and animated by a richly layered woodland soundscape, the handmade mannequins appear corporeal in their softer lighting. The artist's interest in animism—the belief that objects, places, and creatures all possess a distinct spiritual essence—informs the exhibition throughout.

Concurrent with her presentation at Pace, Ołowska will show new and old work for her exhibition, *Visual Persuasion*, at Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Torino, opening November 2. At The Serravalle Foundation, Porto, the artist's iconic performance, *The Alphabet*, will be staged on November 5 as part of their live programme.

Pace Gallery and Paulina Ołowska would like to thank the LET IT GO team: Sayuri Chetti; Amy Corall; Yasmin el Yassini; Rick Geene; Lou Renard, and Kamil Sznajder. Jessica Segall collaborated with Ołowska on the chandeliers, with additional support from Christoph Krane. Photographs by Arthur Elgort, Kacper Kasprzyk, and Branislav Šimončík were the source for paintings in the exhibition. Additional thanks to William Flatmo, Laura Grudniewska, Dorota Kidziak, Monika Kucel, Aleksandra Lewandowska, Viktoriia Semenska, Kate Smith-Raabe, Christen Sveeas and the HAHNEL BUJALSKI SPÓŁKA team for all their help with *Squelchy Garden Mules and Mamunas*.

Paulina Ołowska's (b. 1976, Gdansk, Poland) multifarious practice spans painting, collage, sculpture, video, installation, and performance. Her work is deeply engaged with the political and social histories of Eastern Europe, American consumerism and pop culture, feminism, and the aesthetics of fashion advertisements. Ołowska's figurative paintings often feature women in a wide range of environments, from offices and shops to farms and jungles, challenging art historical conventions as well as traditional notions of femininity in Eastern and Western cultures. She has had one-person exhibitions at Kunsthalle Basel; the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; the Zacheta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw; and Kistefos Museum, Norway. Ołowska received the prestigious Aachen Art Prize in 2014, with an associated exhibition at the Ludwig Forum for International Art, Aachen, Germany. She has also staged performances at Tate Modern, the Carnegie International and the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Ołowska presented the ballet "Slavic Goddesses—A Wreath of Ceremonies" at the Kitchen, New York, in 2017 and "Slavic Goddesses and The Ushers" at the Museo del Novecento in Milan in 2018 and at the Kestner Gesellschaft in July 2023. Her work was featured in the 2017 National Gallery of Victoria Triennial in Melbourne and the 2018 Liverpool Biennial, as well as in group exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw; mumok, Vienna; Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg; Migros Museum Für Gegenwartskunst, Zürich; New Museum, New York; Tate Modern, London, and LACMA, Los Angeles.

Pace is a leading international art gallery representing some of the most influential contemporary artists and estates from the past century, holding decades-long relationships with Alexander Calder, Jean Dubuffet, Barbara Hepworth, Agnes Martin, Louise Nevelson, and Mark Rothko. Pace enjoys a unique U.S. heritage spanning East and West coasts through its early support of artists central to the Abstract Expressionist and Light and Space movements.

Since its founding by Arne Glimcher in 1960, Pace has developed a distinguished legacy as an artist-first gallery that mounts seminal historical and contemporary exhibitions. Under the current leadership of CEO Marc Glimcher, Pace continues to support its artists and share their visionary work with audiences worldwide by remaining at the forefront of innovation. Now in its seventh decade, the gallery advances its mission through a robust global program—comprising exhibitions, artist projects, public installations, institutional collaborations, performances, and interdisciplinary projects. Pace has a legacy in art bookmaking and has published over five hundred titles in close collaboration with artists, with a focus on original scholarship and on introducing new voices to the art historical canon.

Today, Pace has seven locations worldwide, including European footholds in London and Geneva as well as Berlin, where the gallery established an office in 2023. Pace maintains two galleries in New York—its headquarters at 540 West 25th Street, which welcomed almost 120,000 visitors and programmed 20 shows in its first six months, and an adjacent 8,000 sq. ft. exhibition space at 510 West 25th Street. Pace’s long and pioneering history in California includes a gallery in Palo Alto, which was open from 2016 to 2022. Pace’s engagement with Silicon Valley’s technology industry has had a lasting impact on the gallery at a global level, accelerating its initiatives connecting art and technology as well as its work with experiential artists. Pace consolidated its West Coast activity through its flagship in Los Angeles, which opened in 2022. Pace was one of the first international galleries to establish outposts in Asia, where it operates permanent gallery spaces in Hong Kong and Seoul, along with an office and viewing room in Beijing. In spring 2024, Pace will open its first gallery space in Japan in Tokyo’s new Azabudai Hills development.

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