

PAINTING BY MARIJA KNEŽEVIĆ

# REFLECTION

A & A  
INTERIOR

JANUARY 22<sup>ND</sup>

2026

MARCH 20<sup>TH</sup>

# THE ICONIC TURN

Regardless of how arrogantly a critic, theorist, or historian may value their own thought over art, they merely touch it. A word is limited, indirect, and often powerless, and where its dominion comes to an end, a realm of pictures begins. An art expert should therefore attempt to exile the discursive from art: a painting is contaminated by words, too intellectual, and never sufficiently reaching its traditional domain of feelings and intuition. Its marriage with philosophy is barren and fruitless. A dedicated critic (who stands on cultural barricades) should work within logorrhoea to preserve the dignity of words, and within contemporary pictoriality to preserve the power of painting.

It is therefore entirely justified that the painter Marija Knežević (b. 1967) searches for what is “to be a strong motive for creation”, and finds it in female eroticism, the forest, and water, which may also be seen as erotic symbols. For her, painting is a source of life, *fons vitae*, accessed through the “tactility involved in shaping the body”, as she calls it. In her rising realism, one of the great stylistic formations, she is also interested in the psychology of figures and in the self-portrait as the deepest descent into selfhood; for then the painter can hide nothing from herself and becomes the whole world. She is one of the rarest painters still able to feel “excitement before creation; each painting represents an adventure”, as the artist stated in one of her interviews. Her self-portraits are not beautiful, nor beautified, but truthful. “Eyes are crucial” in a painting that relies on eroticism, poetics, and light. The very act of gently touching the canvas with a brush is somewhat erotic, and the vital juices of painting are eroticism. If nature can heal, then painting can

too: it is a visual vitamin, a remedy for trauma. Each portrait is not merely a new surprise, as the artist claims, but a new initiation as well.

Her paintings are paradoxical: calm, steady, deep, yet dynamic, sometimes psychologically obsessive; the vision is clear and strong. However, this is not obsessive but stimulative figuration – one that supports rather than annihilates being, that strives towards being and not non-being, unlike the majority of the (post-)avant-garde. That is why, for her, painting is a kind of code of meaning and symbols, an aesthetic, psychological, and moral incentive, a canon and a standard for behaviour in private, public, and artistic spheres. She affirms *eikon* – the original image as *imago*, representation, and figure – rather than a (self-)destructive experiment or a reductive process. This artist is aware of *eikon* as representation, of the advantage of pure art over the broader and artistically less binding world of the visual, because her painting penetrates the psyche as a direct expression. In doing so, she is interested not only in the aspect of *eikon* but also in *eidos* – the concept and idea of the artwork – for she is not a mere painter who impulsively smears paint on the canvas, but a composed creator.

Even the ageing Renoir wondered where the human figure had disappeared from art, and from the period of Munch to De Chirico it increasingly vanished, becoming robotic. Marija Knežević, based on her mastery of craft, is perhaps the first in our art to achieve what is known in Western theory as the Iconic Turn – the pictorial reversal, a turn from the non-figurative avant-garde back to the image. She achieved this already at the beginning of her creative path in the early 1990s.

While others smeared neo-expressionist ideological slogans against national being, she painted – outside any political or artistic agenda – the most beautiful child's portrait in Serbian art, exposing herself anew as a mother in homage to her daughter. She reached unprecedented levels of humanity, poetic and intimate values at a time when these were dismissed and forgotten by various technicians of raw and cruel art. That, in fact, is the meaning of visual art: the connection of figure (and thus the *Prvolik* – Jesus Christ as the divine prototype), mind, artistry, and respect for the craft, towards which this artist vigorously strives. She is an *artifex*, a skilful master, but also a woman who has not suppressed her femininity and sensibility, her poetry, which Picasso claimed to be the most important element in art.

**Dejan Đorić**

“Autoakt” is an act of self-observation, yet of self-transcendence, too. It is neither narcissistic nor voyeuristic – it is an attempt at an honest, often brutal, but also tender dialogue with the selfhood. These faces and bodies are not offered to the public as ideals, but as the truth of a process. In a time when body images are multiplied daily – through social networks, aestheticised representations, and filtered versions of reality – “AUTOAKT” attempts to restore weight and complexity to what it means to “be in a body.” “AUTOAKT” is a space of vulnerability, but also of presence. As such, it does not offer a conclusion, but an open gaze toward the inner self. While making the “AUTOAKT”, I feel painting returning to its deepest meaning: to be a bridge between the inner and the outer, between myself and the world, as well as between myself and myself.

**Marija Knežević**

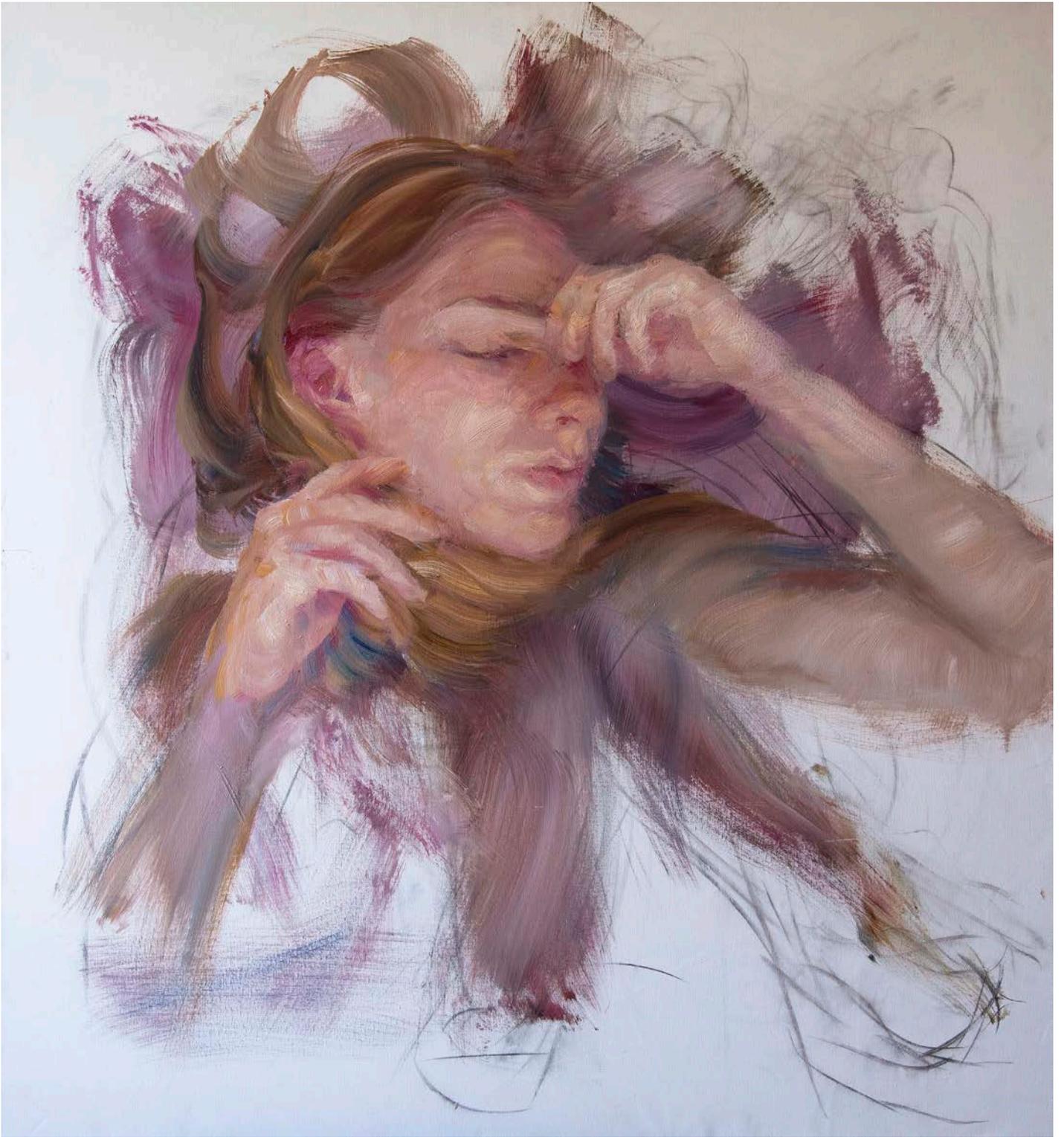


**DANCING IN THE FOG**

2025. Oil on canvas  
135×135 cm



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**MEMORY**

2025. Oil on canvas

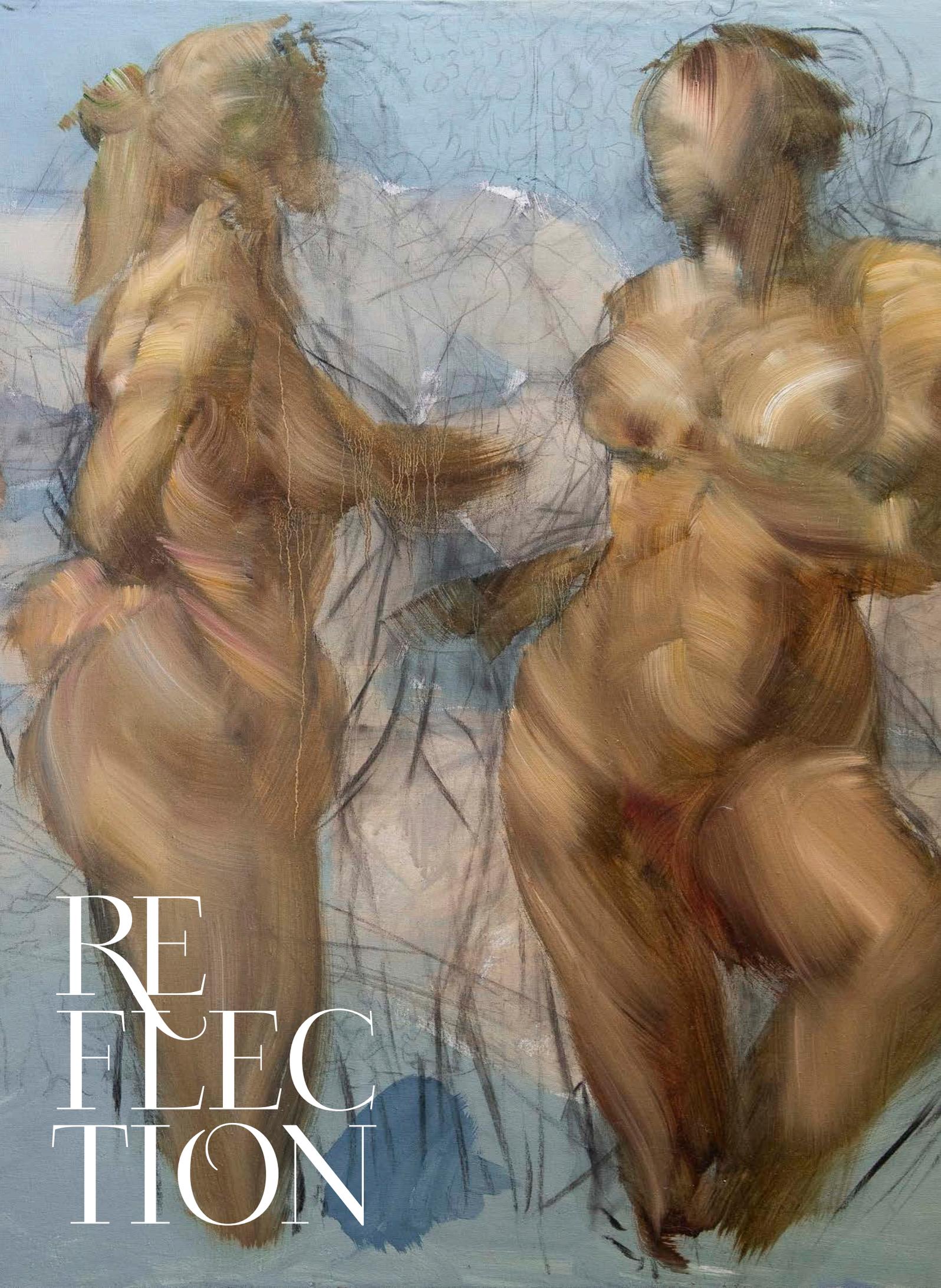
120×110 cm



**IN THE BATHROOM**

2025. Oil on canvas

90×110 cm

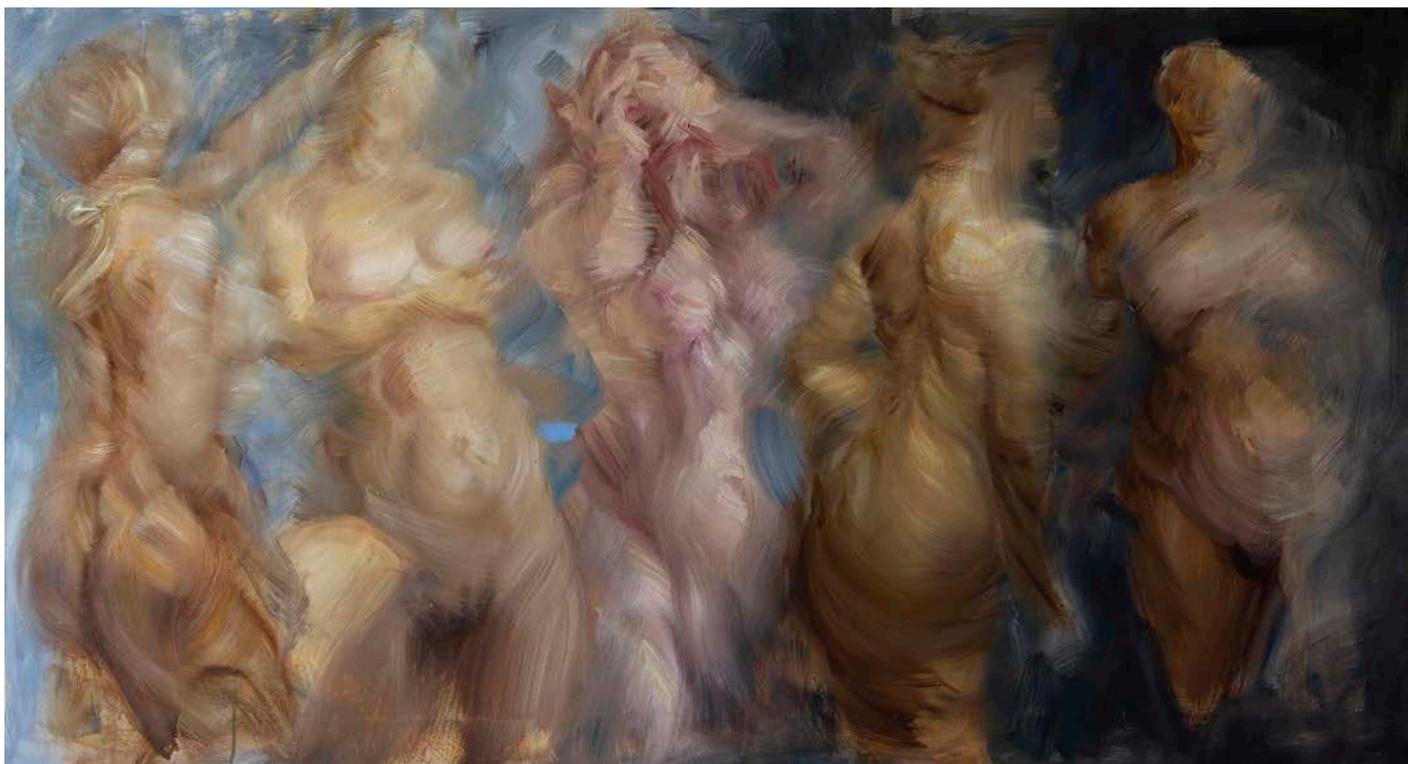


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**TORSO**

2025. Oil on canvas  
120×70 cm



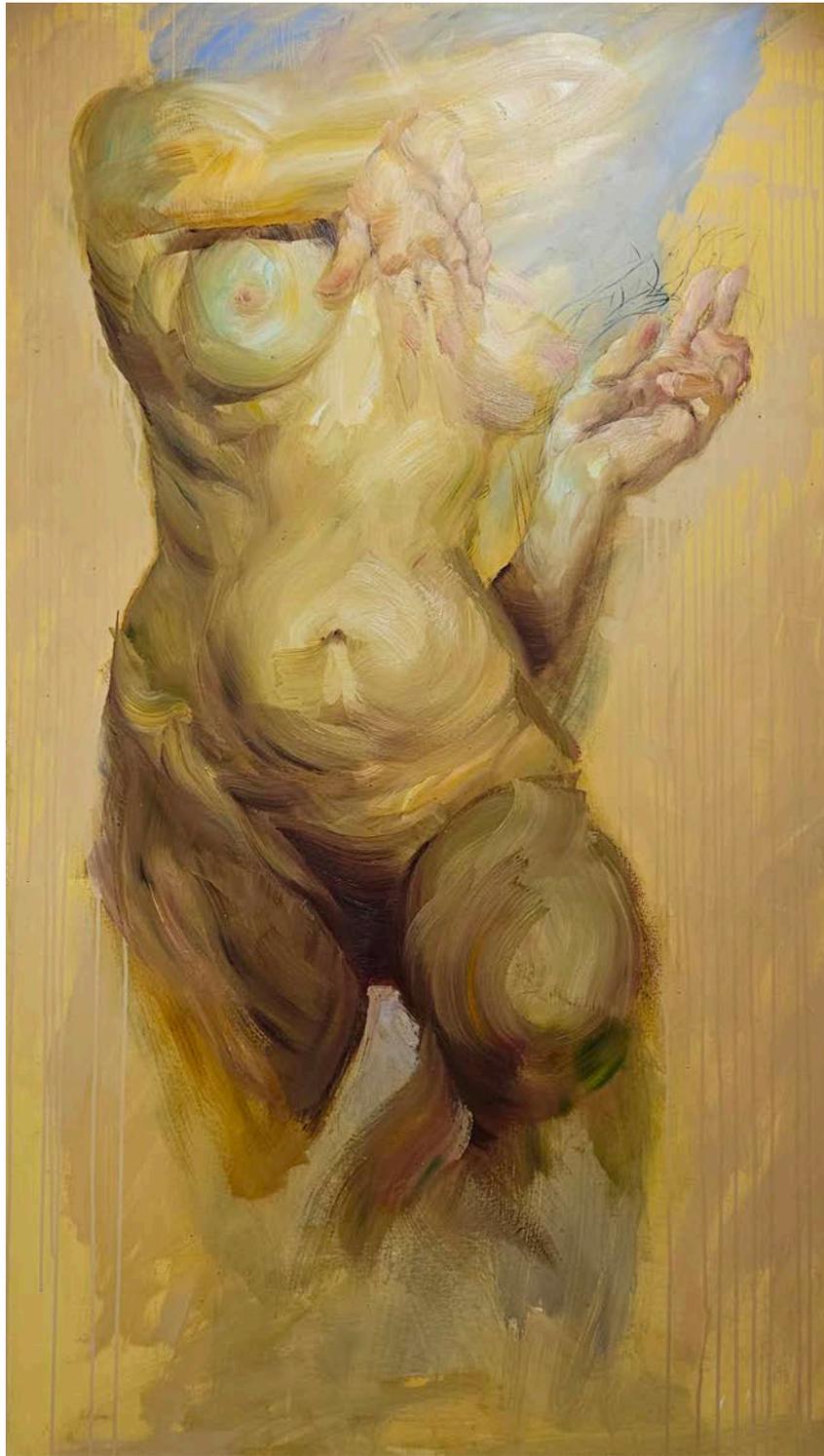
**BATHING**

2025. Oil on canvas  
84×155,5 cm

10



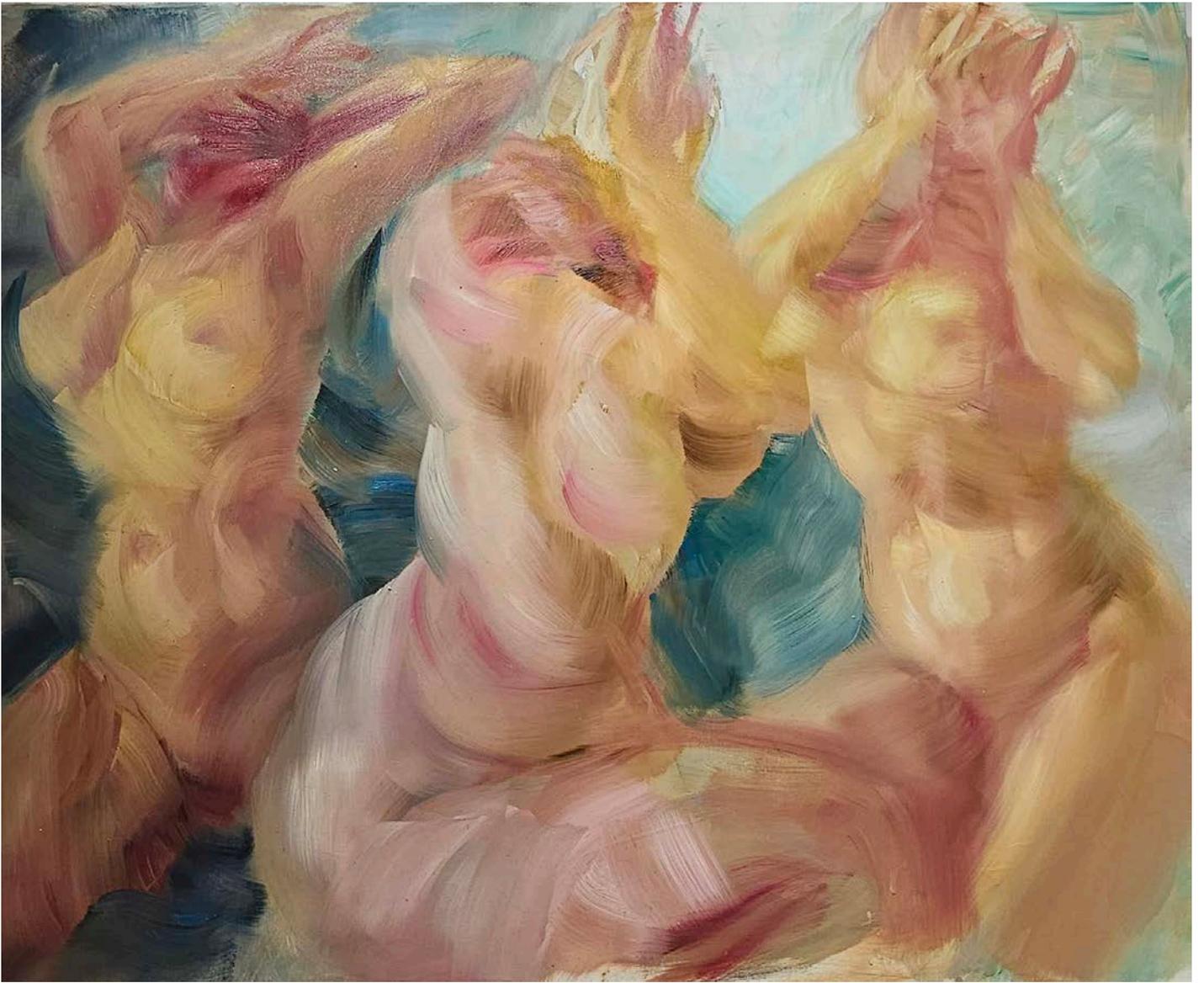
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**REACH FOR A CLOUD**

2025. Oil on canvas

150×85 cm

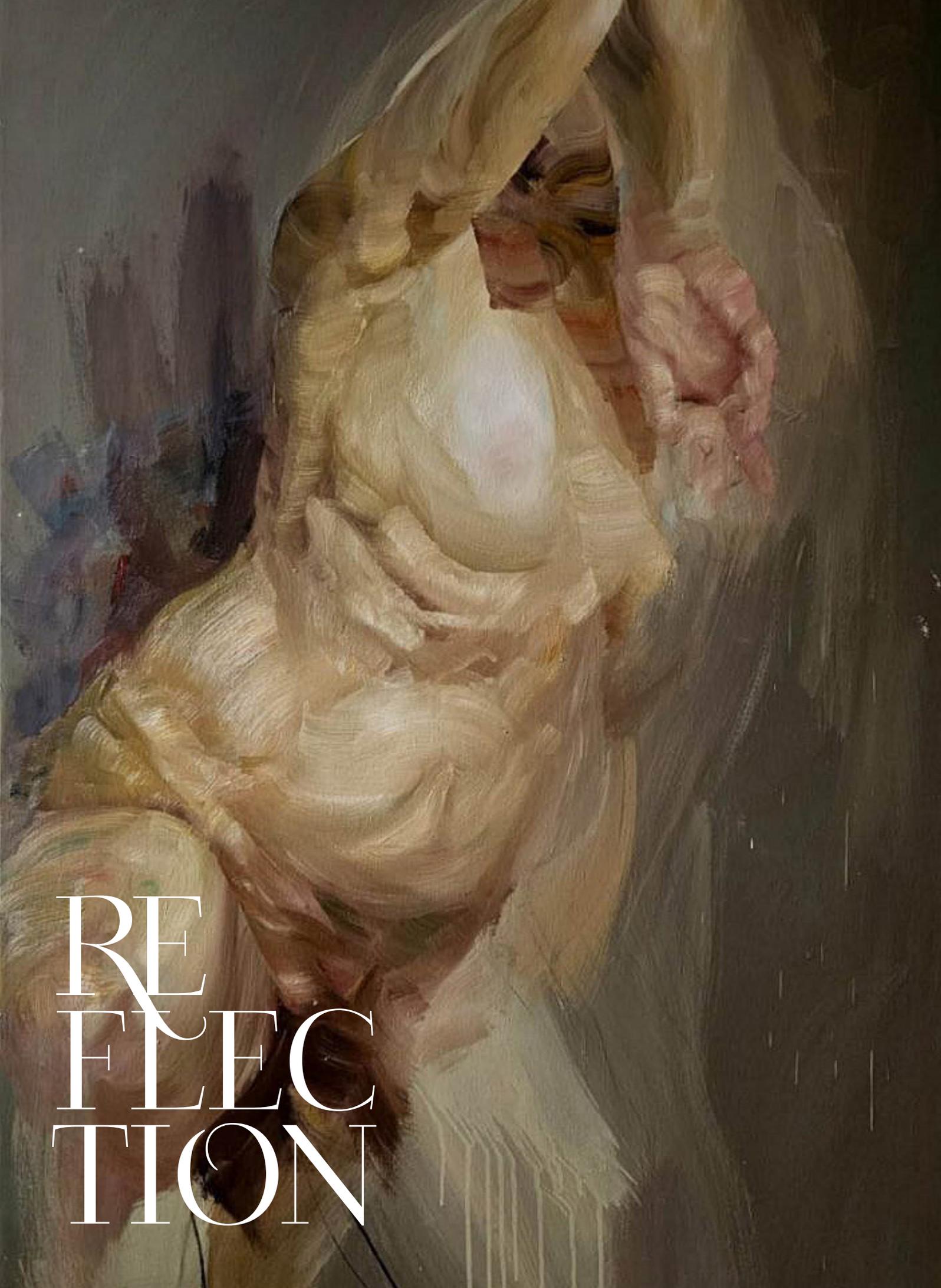


**DANCING TRIO**

2025. Oil on canvas

90×110 cm

13

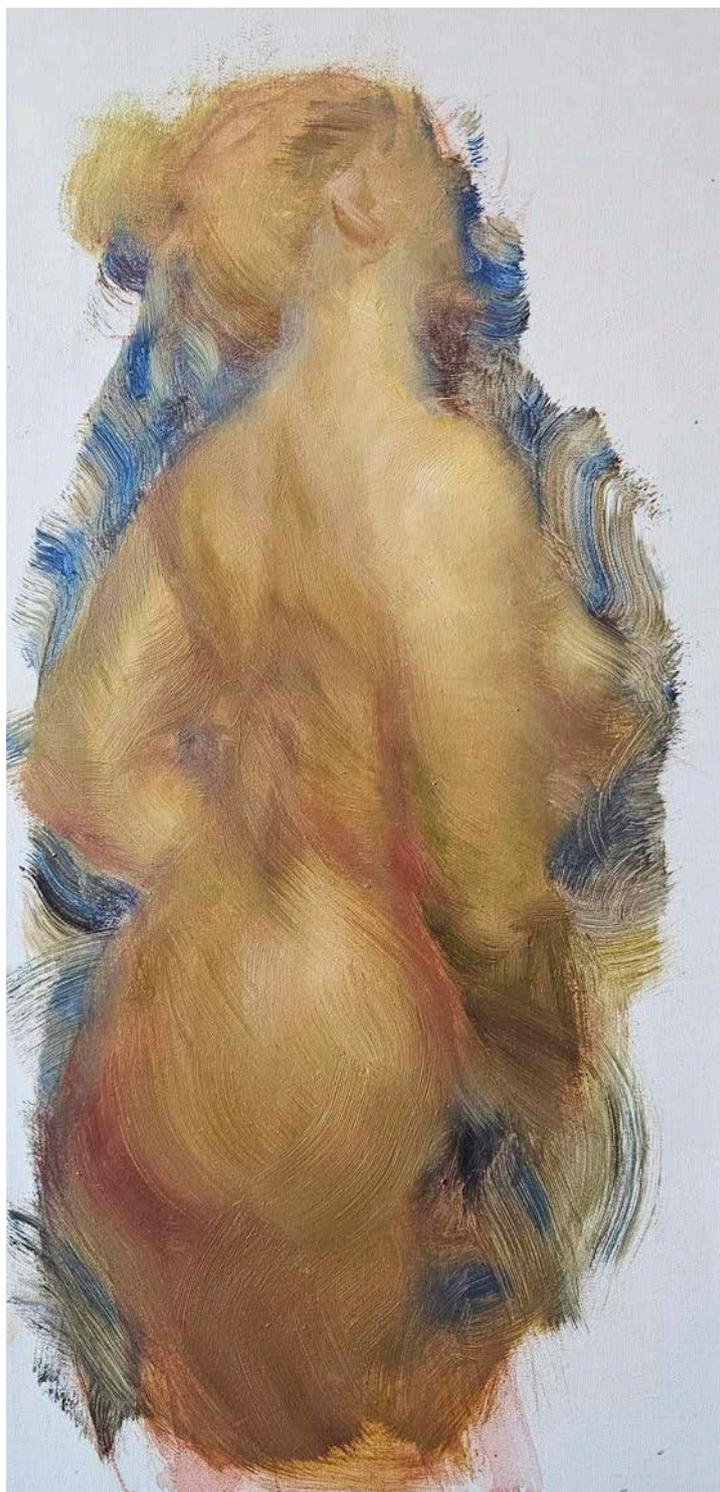


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**FREEDOM FROM THE SHADOW**

Diptych. 2025. Oil on canvas  
150×80 cm



**THE CLOUD WOMAN**

2025. Oil on canvas

60×30 cm

16



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**AWAKENING**

2025. Oil on canvas

60×120 cm

18



**UNTITLED**

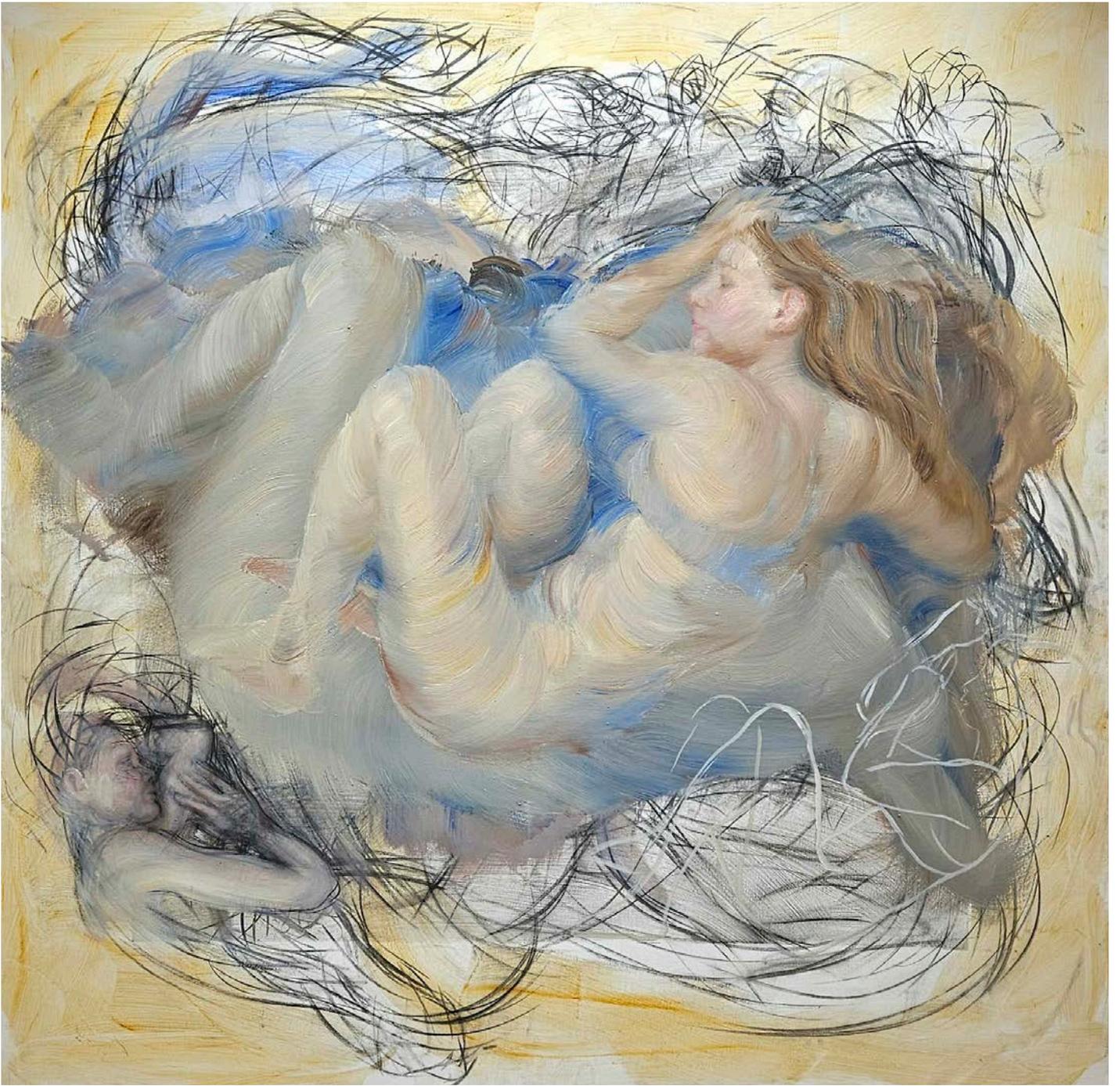
2025. Oil on canvas

150×85 cm

19



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**VORTEX**

2025. Oil on canvas  
135×135 cm



**SPRING MORNING**

2025. Oil on canvas  
135×135 cm



**MARIJA KNEŽEVIĆ** was born in 1967 in Belgrade. She graduated from the University of Belgrade, Faculty of Fine Arts (FLU), Department of Painting, in the class of Professor Momčilo Antonović, in 1991. She obtained her master's degree in the same professor's class (in the field of painting, with a focus on colour) in 1994.

Since 1991, she has been a member of ULUS (The Association of Serbian Visual Artists) with the status of a freelance artist.

She has participated in numerous art festivals in her home country and abroad (Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Tunisia and Malta).

Her works are held in numerous collections in Serbia and abroad (Italy, Switzerland, Sweden, Malta and Canada).

### EXHIBITIONS

From 1988 to 2023, she participated in over 100 collective exhibitions in Serbia and abroad.

#### INDIVIDUAL EXHIBITIONS

- 2025** Gallery of the Museum of Tivat, Montenegro
- 2023** Nikola Radošević Gallery, Belgrade, Serbia
- 2018** Milan Tucović Gallery, Požega, Serbia
- 2017** Cvijeta Zuzorić Gallery, Belgrade, Serbia
- 2013** Gallery of the Institute for Cultural Development Research, Belgrade, Serbia
- 2013** ULUS Gallery, Belgrade, Serbia
- 2009** Mladenovac Cultural Centre Gallery, Serbia
- 2008** Smederevska Palanka Cultural Centre Gallery, Serbia
- 2005** Rakovica Cultural Centre Gallery, Belgrade, Serbia
- 2001** ULUS Gallery, Belgrade, Serbia
- 1994** FLU Gallery, Belgrade, Serbia
- 1994** Kolarac People's University Gallery, Belgrade, Serbia
- 1991** Kruševac City Museum Gallery, Kruševac, Serbia
- 1991** Studentski Grad Cultural Centre Gallery, Belgrade, Serbia

#### AWARDS

- 2024** Fourth Prize for Painting, *First Salon Pean Sindik*, Tivat, Montenegro
- 2020** First Prize for Painting, International Exhibition *AkT Marko Gregović*, Montenegro
- 2017** Grand Prize, *October Salon*, Belgrade, Serbia
- 2017** Golden Brush Award, ULUK ART, Kostolac, Serbia
- 2015** Special Recognition, *VOVA Biennale of Miniature*, Hungary
- 2012** Grand Prize, *Zemun Salon*, Belgrade, Serbia
- 2012** First Prize for Painting, *Small Format Exhibition*, Šabac, Serbia
- 2012** First Prize for Painting, *XI International Biennale of Miniature*, Gornji Milanovac, Serbia
- 2011** First Prize for Painting, *Eighth Belgrade Salon*, Belgrade, Serbia
- 2010** First Prize for Painting, Belgrade Mini Art Scene
- 1992** Award of Painting Colony Protić, Gornja Dobrinja, Serbia
- 1991** Award for Best Student Drawing, Belgrade, Serbia
- 1991** *Perspective IXI* Award, Belgrade, Serbia





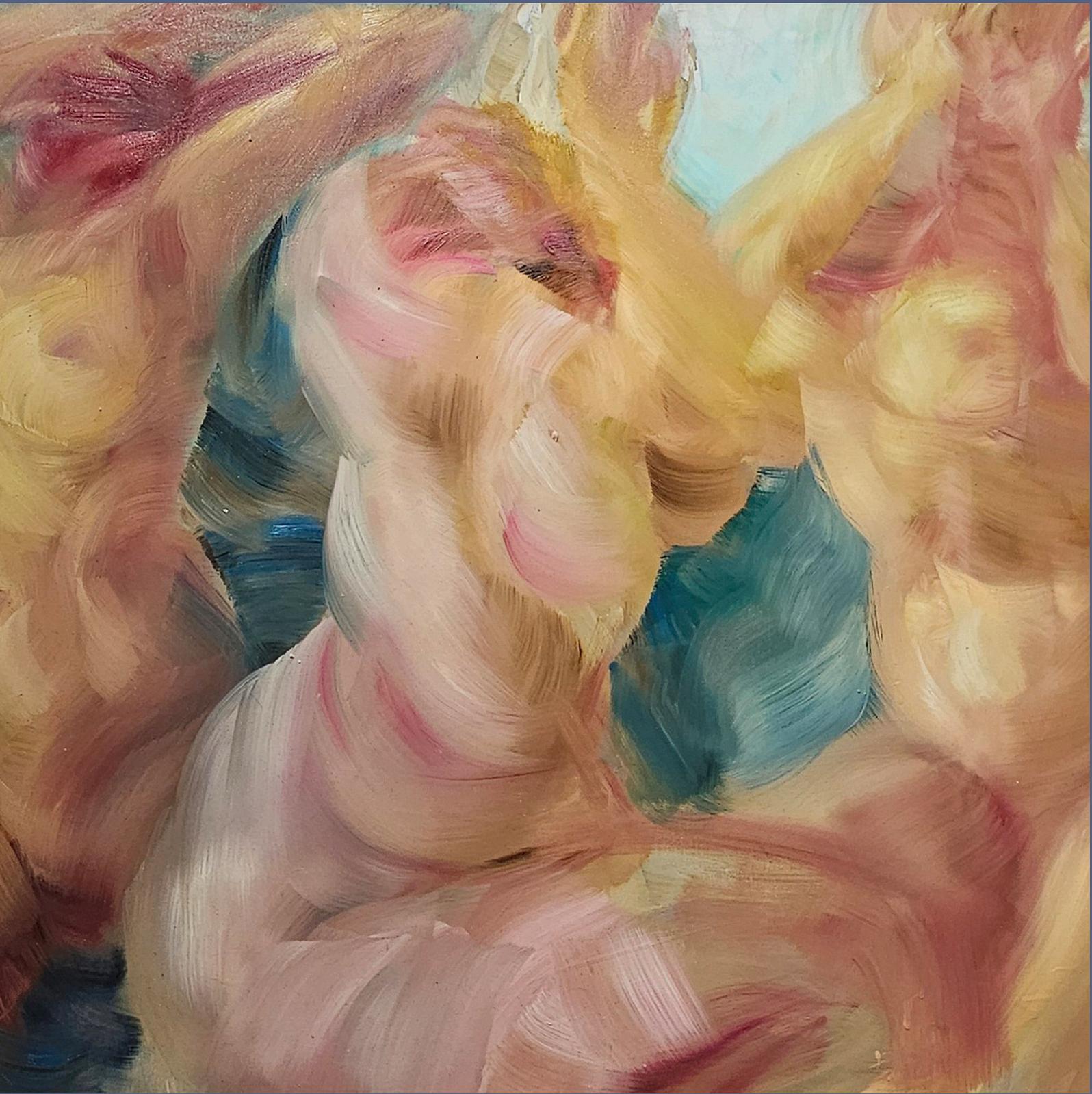
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# A&A INTERIOR



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