

ELENA SISTO

wonder women

April 2 – May 1, 2022

PAMELA SALISBURY GALLERY

Hudson, New York

Dreaming on the Carpets

I love the challenge of throwing seemingly disparate elements onto a rectangle, like throwing dice. Then I play them off each other, according to the visual physics of the situation, until they begin to make sense.

The experience of most paintings becomes like a wrestling match--a free-for-all. Then the painting or drawing gradually develops its own internal logic. Sometimes that happens quickly and sometimes it plays itself out over weeks, months or years. I imagine it's like climbing a mountain--every so often there's a plateau, where things slip out with little struggle. Some pictures become very dense over time. But some stay light, and there is every gradation in between.

Because I work this way, I prefer not to recognize any line between abstraction and figuration. Abstraction, to me, is the means of structuring space. Figuration is one type of result. Like any element of a picture, it can be constructed abstractly, if it wants to be.

For me, what structures space structures emotion. There are always narrative threads in the mix. For instance, wonder woman has begun presenting herself as an every-person. The wonder women are about the capabilities and potentiality of women. They're not heroes. Residing mostly in slightly archaic, intimate spaces, with more than a whiff of the harem, they're off duty, waiting for something purposeful to come up, thinking, conversing quietly. The comic character Wonder Woman was not originally American. She's based on the myths of the ancient Amazons. Her mother, Queen Hippolyta, formed her out of clay, like the Golem of Jewish tradition. Cleopatra has also made an appearance in this group of paintings.

Textile patterns are another influence. There are many references to my grandmother's antique Persian carpets, which I grew up looking at, dreaming on, and being mesmerized by. Images from Navajo textiles (which were often based on Middle Eastern rugs) also come into the mix. Fifty years ago, I studied shearing, carding, spinning, dyeing and weaving on the Navajo reservation with Tessie Skeets, a master weaver.

I love the infinite extension implied by pattern-limitless rhythm in space. If you find the rhythm of a picture it feels like you can do anything. (If you run out of red paint, a green will do the job.) And I love the intimate center where large forces converge.

Something mysterious happens with the forms and shapes while working in just black and white. The white forms can only exist by virtue of the black ones surrounding them, and vice versa. Without color the give-and-take is economical, direct and more obvious. It has metaphorical value. Certain distinctions between images fall away and new configurations can appear.

Making (or looking at) a painting is like finding one small island of coherence within a larger chaos. I'm trying not to be in control, except temporarily, because I want the painting to tell me what to do. Reaching a precarious but convincing unity of the whole is the goal.

Elena Sisto

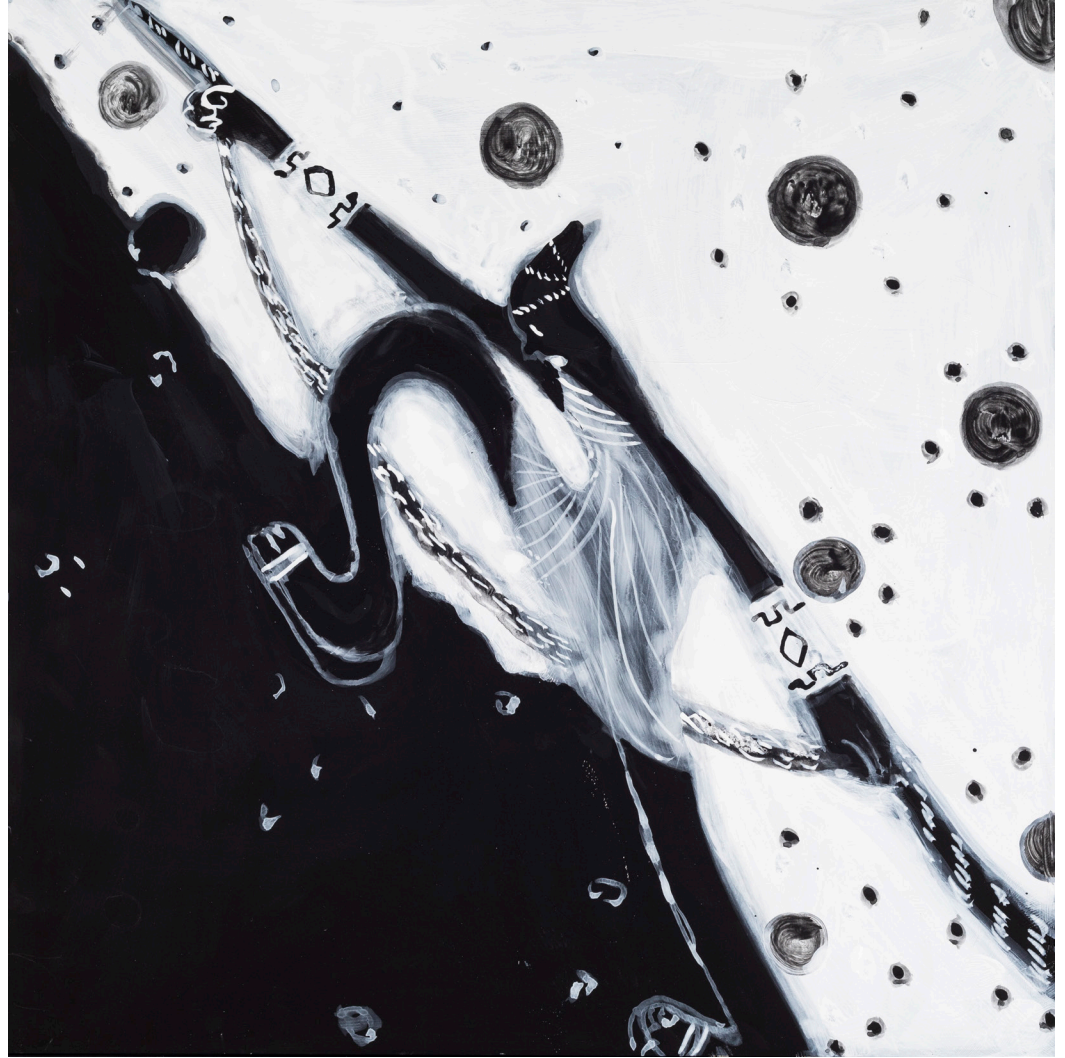
Milan, NY

02/05/2022

cleopatra, 2021, mixed media on panel, 24 x 36 inches



moon/climb, 2019-2021, mixed media on panel, 16 x 16 inches



penthesilea, 2021, ink on panel, 12 x 12 inches



the daily, 2019–2021, mixed media on panel, 11 x 14 inches



per stirpes, 2022, mixed media on panel, 24 x 36 inches



amphibia #2, 2021, mixed media on panel, 16 x 12 inches



pieta, 2020–2021, mixed media on panel, 18 x 24 inches



joan, 2021, mixed media on panel, 24 x 18 inches



circe #1, 2021, mixed media on panel, 16 x 16 inches



wonder woman, 2021, ink on panel, 16 x 16 inches



helen of sparta, 2021, mixed media on panel, 8 x 10 inches



athena #1, 2020–2021, mixed media on panel, 16 x 16 inches



circe #2, 2022, mixed media on panel, 16 x 16 inches



amphibia, 2021, mixed media on panel, 18 x 14 inches



descent from the moon, 2020-2021, mixed media on panel, 16 x 16 inches



attic, 2020, ink on panel, 18 x 14 inches





www, 2021, mixed media on panel, 25 x 36 inches

Elena Sisto is known for her figurative paintings that frequently focus on the experiences of being a woman. She paints in New York, NY and Milan, NY.

She received her BA in Art from Brown University and Rhode Island School of Design in 1975. In addition, she studied at the New York Studio School, the Skowhegan School and Yale Norfolk. She is a 2013 recipient of the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship, two National Endowment for the Arts Visual Artist's Fellowships (1983-88 and 1989-90), the Inglis Griswold Nelson Prize from the National Academy of Art and Design (2008) and is a Fellow of the National Academy of Art and Design. She was also the recipient of a purchase prize from the American Academy of Arts and Letters 2021.

Sisto has had solo museum exhibitions at the Maier Museum, Lynchburg VA, the Greenville County Museum, Greenville, SC, the Katzen Museum at American University, Washington, DC and the Miami Dade Museum of Art + Design, Miami, FL and was included in the 43rd Corcoran Biennial.

Her work is included in numerous private collections as well as the Maier Museum, the Miami Dade Museum of Art + Design, the Greenville County Museum, the Newark Museum, and Colorado University Art Museum. Her exhibitions have been reviewed in the *New York Times*, the *New Yorker*, *Arts magazine*, *Art in America*, *Modern Painters Review*, *Newark Star Ledger*, and the *L.A. Register*. She is represented by Bookstein Projects in NYC, Shoshana Wayne Gallery in L.A, and Pamela Salisbury Gallery in Hudson, NY.

www.elenasisto.com

Cover Image

sisters, 2021, mixed media on panel, 14 x 17 inches

This catalogue was published on the occasion of the exhibition:

Elena Sisto: *wonder women*

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