

# VEDA

## ORDAINED<sup>1</sup>, HORNY<sup>2</sup> AND HORNED<sup>3</sup> CURATED BY CÉDRIC FAUQ

OCTOBER 8 - NOVEMBER 6, 2021

I was 6 or 7 when I went on a school trip to Musée de Cluny in Paris' 5th district and put in front of the *Dame à la Licorne* tapestries – a middle age jewel, a tale of desire. I still remember how dark the galleries were, and the effect these had on me. I was startled by the red background, and the strange look of the unicorn – I mean, it has a beard. I also remember the effect that the story behind the unicorn's horn origins – actually a narwhal's tooth –, triggered: fascination and repulsion. I was dazed by the fact that something so unique and beautiful, with so many curative properties, could be the result of the hunt of such a wonderful sea creature. Oh well, I was young.

When invited to devise a show at Veda in Florence, I somehow learnt about the unicorn that stands in the Grotto of Animals in the Medici Villa of Castello, which made me reflect on this first aesthetic experience in a museum context – as far as I can remember –. I was also re-watching the Youtube series *Charlie the Unicorn* – which almost made it to the show, but it went to another direction –. At the same time, I was reading Alexis Pauline Gumbs's *Undrowned: Black Feminists Lessons from Marine Animals* (2020) who writes:

“The fact that you grew up not knowing that narwhals were a real animal swimming around in the Arctic right now, is not a coincidence. It is the result of a long and lucrative conspiracy. Turns out, since the Middle Ages, whalers, traders, explorers, and even chemists collaborated to hide the existence of the narwhal as a real animal, while selling their tusks as “unicorn horns” at a huge profit. It makes me think about the ways enforced marginality and increased profit margins have been linked to each other for a long time.”

I guess unicorns were around me a lot, which also made me wonder why this imaginary animal became such a symbol for the gay community. Even more so surprising – or maybe not – when you learn that the narwhal's horn was gendered – in the middle age it was believed that only male narwhals had horns. All of these reflections, and ongoing discussions and encounters with artists dealing with desire, beautiful monsters, enclosing and *untamability*, gave birth to *Ordained*<sup>1</sup>, *Horny*<sup>2</sup> & *Horned*<sup>3</sup>.

The first thing that came to mind when visiting the temporary gallery space of Veda was that it felt like a portion of racetrack – for horse racing even –. This approach stuck with me and led me to treat the installation with the idea of speed – or at least pace – as a guide. You'll probably go quite fast entering the show, because, seemingly, there are not so many things to see. But then

# VEDA

you'll slow down. You'll then encounter **Sybil Montet's** wallpaper-tapestry that both makes you stop and want to follow the dynamics of the image. You might also get back, as you would have missed many transparent things.

Transparency being one of the motifs of the exhibition: from **Juliette Ayrault's** first sculpture in the exhibition, to **Tarek Lakhrici's** poem on plexiglass, **Floryan Varennes's** mace, or even **Azzeazy's** paper and **Roy Köhnke's** sculptures. Light passes through, like sun and moon through the ice, that which the narwhal breaks with the help of its horn. That anecdote also helps read most of the sculptures in the exhibition in their duality: both weapons and jewels, armament and ornament, remedy and poison – smell **Varennes's** lavender filling the air –.

Finally, animality and its relation to enclosure is another crux of the exhibition. First inspired by the *Unicorn in Captivity* (1495-1505), there is a running thread woven between the sculptures of **Roy Köhnke** and **Juliette Ayrault**, **Elsa Brès's** video installation, and **Azzeazy's** drawings and etchings. While **Brès** reflects on the wild boar as a symbol of the struggle against property, **Ayrault** figures spurs on printed quilts, like tools that can no longer be used for taming horses. **Köhnke's** gathering of sculptures breaks down the boundary between the inside and outside of an imaginary body, soft and full of holes.

Eventually, **Azzeazy's** drawings and etchings are grounds on which, agile healers and the regenerated barely ever touch ground. They may seem light like tight strands of greased hair. Or heavy, as if their limb and extensions were braiding a solid architecture of metal. If you don't know how to look at them, you can turn around, so their gaze could pierce a hole in the wall, through your back.

To all the narwhals,  
all the unicorns,  
The artists,  
Claudia,  
Gianluca,

Thanks  
Cf

\*Note from the curator: The last paragraph has been (re)written by the artist **Azzeazy**. A previous version of the text existed, written by myself, but was infused by a racist and sexualised perspective on the work, one that was the consequence of my own gaze on the work (as a lightskin gay man) and a desire to make it "fit" the curatorial framework of the exhibition. By way of this change and this note, I'd like to apologise to the artist as well as the work, whose power is such that my words couldn't hold its true force.