

"The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters."
– Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937)

In the paintings and drawings of Emeli Theander, the human being stands at the center. Unclothed women carry infants, surrounded by beast-like creatures or mischievous skeletons. The oil paintings depict archetypal scenes and art-historical sujets: women sitting in nature, bathing, or nursing. Yet, these images are neither elysian nor anachronistic. Rather, they reveal timeless psychological spaces in which landscapes, human figures, and their companions function as symbols. Essential elements such as earth, fire, water, and air bear, embrace, or threaten the partially headless or floating human bodies.

In contrast to the depictions of sky and water in the paintings – which are bathed in the glow of dawn in an almost old-masterly style or rendered in psychedelic swirls – the backgrounds of the drawings are more subdued. On the warm tone of the paper, only a few lines and colorings hint at abstract planes and spaces. Arranged upon them are the figures, executed with graphite strokes that are as light as they are precise, and colored with watercolor or soft pastel.

It seems only natural that all these human beings, depicted in intermediate states – between day and night, between this world and the hereafter, reality and dream – are female. With her capacity to carry life within herself, to bring it forth, and to nourish it with her own fluids, thereby on the one hand outgrowing herself and on the other simultaneously perishing, woman – and with her the notion of a Mother Earth – is the epitome of the eternal cycle of transitions.

In her artistic engagement with the question of the self, Theander is interested in the psychoanalytic and hauntological implications of the philosopher Antonio Gramsci's introductory thought, which has once again become highly topical politically. "Something is no longer there, but its effects remain. This creates a confusing overlap of time. My works revolve around those intermediate states in which something has already passed without disappearing, and something new announces itself without yet having taken shape," the artist explains.

The silent companions of the human beings, who are depicted as either earthy or fleetingly soul-like, appear in Theander's pictures as creatures that are admittedly uncanny, but not necessarily dangerous. These external as well as internal demons seem tamed by a serenity of the figures that stands opposite them in the face of the more powerful dimensions of life and death.

Cora Waschke, 2026

Emeli Theander (*1984 in Sweden) lives and works in Berlin. She studied Fine Arts under Prof. Valérie Favre at the Berlin University of the Arts (UdK), graduating as a master student (Meisterschülerin) in 2012. A former fellow of the German Academic Scholarship Foundation (2009–2011) and the Platoon Kunsthalle in Seoul (2010), her accolades include the Merkel Collection and Painting Foundation Prize (2013), the Dorothea Konwiarz Foundation scholarship (2014/15), the Delphian Open Call (2020), and recognition at the Jackson's Art Prize (2024). Her work is exhibited internationally in institutions, galleries, and art fairs, including Kunstmuseum Bochum, Kommunale Galerie Berlin, the Estonian Museum of Applied Arts and Design (Tallinn), Galerie C / Drawing Now (Paris), Galerie DYS (Brussels), Galerie Wolfsen (Aalborg), Bonian Space (Beijing), Galerie Sczydlowski (Warsaw), and Kunstverein Montabaur b-05.