

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Elena Sisto: Trickster Makes This World (For Lewis Hyde)**

September 12 – October 25, 2024

Artist Reception: Thursday, September 12<sup>th</sup> from 6:00-8:00pm



Elena Sisto, *Olympus*, 2019-24, Mixed media, 8 x 10 inches. (BP#ES-9260)

Bookstein Projects is pleased to announce an exhibition of recent paintings by Elena Sisto. This is the artist's fourth solo-show with the gallery.

Painter Elena Sisto has often focused on the agency of women in her work over five decades. But since the beginning of the pandemic she has painted intimate smaller works in black and white (with occasional flashes of red and silver). In this exhibition, women become gods and heroes in scenes based on classical myths. But these are hardly straightforward images. Sisto uses myth, monochrome, and feminism as

building blocks to construct deeply personal narratives. Beauty and meaning emerge in unexpected ways.

She calls her show "Trickster Makes This World," in homage to a book with that title by Lewis Hyde. He writes about trickster figures like Hermes, who Hyde argues emerged just as ancient Greek society was transitioning from a gift society to one based on money and financial exchange. "He is the god of commerce," Sisto says, "the god of exchange--of crossroads, of hinges, or of any place where information or ideas from different groups intermingle. He's also the patron of thieves."

In these paintings, ideas accordingly intermingle with a wild charm. Figures change scale, shapes evolve before your eyes, backgrounds become foregrounds, and meaning is deliberately elusive. Everywhere is an undertone of humor. Hermes the trickster appears frequently, a shape-shifter intent on defying convention.

Sisto eliminates descriptive and anecdotal detail, to construct figurative paintings that remain abstract, and are best experienced intuitively. "I like the paintings to be open to projection, and to mean something different each time you look at them," she explains.

Her roots are in the New York School, and also in cartooning. Both are at play here, as the paint itself takes on personality and character. For Sisto, meaning arises out of process. She has little idea what a given painting is about until it's finished--sometimes not until months later.

"I'm enveloping myself in a mythic space and sometimes conflicting stories, and then just painting," she explains. "Making a painting is like finding one small island of coherence within a larger chaos. I'm not trying to be in control, because I want the painting to draw me along and tell me what to do. Reaching a precarious but convincing unity is the goal."

Earlier paintings and drawings featured imagined collaborations and confrontations between iconic cartoon women, including Betty Boop, Olive Oyl, Nancy, and Daisy Mae. Then Sisto read *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, by Jill Lepore, where she learned that William Moulton Marston based his character in part on ancient Amazons. That was Sisto's route into Greek and other ancient myths, which so richly feed this new body of work.

She is not alone in reinterpreting and extending these myths. Contemporary writers including Margaret Atwood, Pat Barker, Madeline Miller, and Emily H. Wilson have all sought to re-center the female perspective in classical myths.

Sisto's figures, however, are often of indeterminate gender. She presents the viewer with abstracted and androgynous silhouettes, black and white figures that torque in and out of positive and negative space. Hermes' mischievous nature is a guiding spirit.

She talks about "intimate intersections of large forces" in these paintings. The characters seem to be living in a space that is charged with energy, or mutating as they pass through it.

Some of those forces emerge in patterns reminiscent of textiles. Sisto cites influences including her grandmother's antique Persian carpets, the youthful fall she spent studying with a master weaver on a New Mexico Navajo reservation, and Henri Matisse's dynamic use of ornament.

Elena Sisto (b. 1952) splits her time between New York, NY and Rhinebeck, NY. She received her BA from Brown University and studied at the New York Studio School. She has had solo museum shows at the Maier Museum, the Greenville County Museum, the Katzen Museum and the Miami Dade Museum of Art + Design. Sisto was included in the 43rd Corcoran Biennial and groups shows at the Wexner Center, the Weatherspoon Gallery, the Krannert Art Center, the Hunterdon Museum, the Newark Museum, UCLA Wight Gallery and the Katonah Museum. She's the recipient of numerous awards and fellowships including the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, the Inglis Griswold Nelson Prize from the National Academy Museum and School, the George Rickey Foundation Grant and has been a fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center, Yaddo and the Millay Colony.

*Elena Sisto: Trickster Makes This World (For Lewis Hyde)* will be on view from September 12 – October 25, 2024. A reception will be held on Thursday, September 12<sup>th</sup> from 6:00-8:00 pm. Gallery hours are Monday through Friday, 11:00 am to 6:00 pm. For additional information and/or visual materials, please contact the gallery at (212) 750-0949 or by email at [info@booksteinprojects.com](mailto:info@booksteinprojects.com).