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The Beginning of Everything

Paula Santomé

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Paint Shop Berlin

Even at first glance, the large-format graphite drawing “Sinister Garten” feels like stepping into a mysterious scene. Three women stand among trees, their naked bodies unprotected, their posture nonetheless carried by a peculiar self-assurance. Their poses recall classical images of femininity – a bent knee, a foot set slightly back – and yet they radiate something that goes beyond these gestures: determination, defiance, a quiet strength.

One woman lifts a sphere, almost like a fruit, into the air. Is it a ball, is it an apple? The title of the exhibition already suggests a reference to something primordial – to the first desire, the first disobedience, the first step into a new order. Another looks directly at the viewer, as if wanting to share an unspoken knowledge.

The scene is framed, as it were: trees at the edges, their branches reaching into the picture from above, a meadow below. Within this pictorial space, the women’s long, dark hair develops a dynamic of its own. Wild, in waves, partly intertwined, it seems to bring movement into the still composition – almost as if it formed an invisible web connecting the figures.

It is striking how precisely Santomé works out the tension between visible naturalness and concealed artificiality: pubic hair is present, underarm hair is left out. A small difference that immediately raises questions about norms and attributions. The imagery inevitably recalls the Venus in the shell: the classical pose, the long, flowing hair. But whereas Botticelli’s Venus covers her sex, Santomé’s women refuse this gesture. They stand there openly; their bodies are not objects of shame but the starting point of a different narrative.

From this drawing, Santomé spins a many-layered thread. The starting point was a visit to Berlin’s St. Marienkirche, where the depiction of Eve and the serpent prompted the artist to research iconographic origins and patriarchal myths. From this, the exhibition develops a reflection on the moment when everything began – the stories of guilt, seduction and punishment that still shape our ideas of gender and power today.

Santomé’s practice is interdisciplinary and research-based. She transforms traditional techniques such as embossing, wall drawing and leaded glass into contemporary contexts. Her materials are not neutral carriers but charged with meaning: they open up spaces in which myths can be reinterpreted and existing structures broken open.

The Beginning of Everything interweaves fiction and memory, origin myth and present. The exhibition asks about the role of images – how they can cement or shatter power relations. It shows how every story can be rewritten – and that a beginning is always also a possibility.