

# Artlyst

## NAVIGATING DOWNTOWN NYC GALLERIES DURING A PANDEMIC AUTUMN 2020

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Ariana Papademetropoulos, *Curse of the Boys with Butterfly Tattoos*, 2020, Oil on canvas, 84 x 108 1/2 inches (213.4 x 275.6 cm); © Ariana Papademetropoulos, courtesy the artist and Vito Schnabel Projects

As museums and galleries open to eager viewers, I took the easy way out and have only ventured to walking distance galleries. Luckily, this limited geography includes four stellar downtown shows. Two are young women having their first NYC solo shows, and the other pair is from veteran art superstars. All provided much needed divine distraction in these troubling times.

I asked Harry Tenzer, who just conducted a blockbuster sale of Keith Haring's personal art collection at Sotheby's to give me his take on the current NYC art world. "Virtually every commercial and academic art institution has undergone an enormous shift due to the economic and physical constraints caused by COVID. While there will no doubt be some immeasurable losses, this is also a moment of unbridled innovation and collaboration. Art institutions have often adhered to very traditional methods, even when attempting to present the most cutting edge artwork. I see artists, galleries, auction houses and museums working

together in ways that were unimaginable before March. I see an acceptance of online sale and exhibition platforms, making art more widely accessible. I hope that one of the positive legacies of this turbulent moment will be a permanent rethinking of many 20th century methodologies and a new way of both showcasing and selling art. It's already happening!" (Harrison Tenzer, VP, Head of Contemporary Art Online Sales, Sotheby's.)

### **Ariana Papademetropoulos: *Unweave a Rainbow* at Vito Schnabel**

On a recent afternoon, as NYC grapples with increasing Covid fears of an uptick, I walked into Ariana Papademetropoulos first solo show in the city. After putting on paper booties, I sunk my feet into a plush orange wall to wall carpet, as my friend explored a sculptural upholstered rainbow sofa which invited rearrangement.

ARIANA PAPADEMETROPOULOS

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The young Los Angeles based artist is showing all new works, where her featured watermarks have evolved to crystalline spheres floating through large hyperrealistic landscapes, much of the images sourced from National Geographic magazines. Smaller paintings are part of the artist's "symbolist" series and I was especially captured by *Death of a Mermaid*. The almost vaginal folds of a seashell, are embellished with what could be mountains and depicted as shell markings. An enigmatic eye seemingly plucked out of a Man Ray photo, is replete with manicured brow and stares at the viewer. This small-scaled but potent painting is a jewel.

Larger canvases continue the artist's articulate conversation counterpointing nature with domestic tableaux. *Espulsione dalla Discoteca* juxtaposes a weightless sphere with a rural background of an abandoned house on a dirt road, a golden cloud at canvas edge that is both ominous and seductive.

Within the floating bubble, a bucolic landscape depicts a traditional garden, blooming flowers, bench and gate. The painting leaps from plebeian reality to a capricious and captivating interior fantasy.

Another large work, *The Shadow of Clouds* repeats the same wintry mountainous range that may have inspired the seashell in *Death of a Mermaid*. This time, snow embroidered mountains are bisected by a gleaming globe. Suspended inside, a vaguely nostalgic and cosy living room corner beckons, with floral curtains and welcoming chair. By this time, my friends and I had relaxed into the comfortably seductive seating, while contemplating the meticulously rendered and disconcertingly beautiful paintings.

With cinematic focus and bravura painting, Ariana Papademetropoulos is updating surrealism for these fraught and surrealistic times.