

Konstantina Krikzoni

Chamber

March 24 — May 4, 2023

The hollow spaces of the heart; rooms within buildings; worlds within worlds. Chambers are spaces of sanctuary, resonance, and containment; vessels inside vessels designed for the exchange of fluids and sounds. Across her practice, Konstantina Krikzoni constructs spatialised environments that both resemble and contain female bodies; through a visceral palette of pinks and reds, Krikzoni constructs womb-like chambers in which feminine behaviours seep and blossom without limit or restraint. Women kneel, crouch, and recline, captured in intimate moments of metamorphosis or excretion, claiming a place beyond shame and confounding viewers' social expectations.

Krikzoni's first solo exhibition at Newchild is intimately concerned with abjection, drawing on Julia Kristeva's theories around the abjection of the mother. Kristeva argues that society regulates itself by destroying the mother as an object of desire by associating her with the abject, ruling that female bodily fluids, hormones, and hair must be removed, purified, or kept hidden, dealt with behind closed doors. In defiance of these taboos, Krikzoni's paintings depict the symbolic figures of social theory, but these female archetypes emerge in ambiguous and subversive forms, challenging viewers' expectations around women's behaviours.

For example, in paintings such as *Fantastical*, *Orgasmical*, figures squat in a way that might suggest sexual provocation, but also suggests the poses adopted while urinating, defecating, or birthing. The works recall how mothers are bound to their children by fluids, from the blood of the afterbirth caught in a cardboard tray to the contents of nappies and the stream of breastmilk into impatient mouths. These female characters embody states of abjection, but in a way that precludes shame and reclaims the abject, thus moving beyond society's fetishisation of female sexual organs and bodily fluids.

In this exhibition, for the first time one of Krikzoni's abject figures emerges from the canvas into the three-dimensional space of the gallery. Crafted from the same linen the artist uses to stretch her canvases and adorned with latex and hand-sewn seashells, *Cybele* evokes a body that is both monstrous and beautiful, powerful and vulnerable. The sculpture takes its title from Cybele, the goddess-mother of Artemis, who is often depicted in classical Greek art as a many-breasted fertility symbol.

Here, as elsewhere in her oeuvre, Krikzoni draws on her Greek heritage and the stories of her female relatives. The musical associations of the exhibition's title, *Chamber*, allude to Krikzoni's studio practice of singing Greek folk songs while she paints, tapping into a tradition kept alive by women through tunes that resonate through the ages. This is part of her interest in exploring her identity as a woman, an artist, and a female body in the studio, considering, for example, how her monthly hormonal cycle affects how she produces work. These concerns are suggested through the depiction of artistic materials within the world of the paintings, where streams of paint squirt from tubes among the naked bodies, positing a connection between the artist's tools and the abject excreta of the female body.

Krikzoni's practice has its basis in drawing; her works show the centrality of lines and gestures applied to the paper or canvas with a brush in a cycle of drawing and erasure using thin layers of paint. Several of the works in the exhibition, capture atmosphere and tonality by combining a stained effect with painted lines that resemble stitching. These evocations of textiles are linked to Krikzoni's heritage and childhood memories; like the chanting of folklore, domestic sewing is part of a wealth of traditional knowledge safeguarded by the minds and bodies of women.

Krikzoni frequently employs the performativity of working at scale, where larger-than-life figures stare confrontationally from the paintings, drawing viewers in as active participants. She uses the canvases as anchoring points in a process of finding a place in the world, creating a series of spaces characterised by acceptance, fluidity, and openness. For Krikzoni, a painting can be a vessel for empathy, a means of transferring the emotion from the body into the creative object.

Society has always placed taboos and boundaries on women's bodies and behaviour; consequently, it has always feared an uprising of those bodies, a throwing-off of those taboos and those abject designations. In defiance of these social restraints, Krikzoni's paintings loom large to confront the viewer with sexual organs and defecations and the potential power of the feminine amorphous. Using a visual language of chambers, transformations, and excesses, she explores the relationship between bodies and their surroundings, interrogating the boundaries of fleshliness. This is a painterly world of the abject, but also of life through abjection, in which female bodies and creations are embraced and celebrated.

— words by Anna Souter

Konstantina Krikzoni (b. 1987 in Greece) holds an MA in Painting from the Royal College of Art (Arts and Humanities), London. Previously she studied painting at the School of Visual and Fine arts of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (2015), and Mathematics at the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics of the same university (2010). Her work has been exhibited across Europe, the UK and South America. Recent exhibitions include *ARTBO*, Newchild (2022); *Emotions are Fact*, Nosbaum Reding Luxemburg (2022); *Hypnagogia*, 20 Rue de la Poudrière, Brussels (2022) and *The Ceiling With A Tranquil Eye*, Cork Street Galleries and Royal College of Art, London (2021). The artist is a recipient of the Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation Grant (2020), and the NEON Foundation for Culture and Development scholarship (2021/22), and she has been shortlisted for the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) scholarship (2021) and the Chadwell Award, London (2022). She has been awarded the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Artist Fellowship by ARTWORKS (2021). She lives and works in London.

Chamber will run from March 24 to May 4, 2023. Opening hours are Wednesday through Saturday from 13:00 to 18:00 hrs.