

GAGOSIAN



Fondation Louis Vuitton's stunning new art installation at Venice

How Katharina Grosse's artwork at Espace Louis Vuitton is changing the way we see the world

Helena Lee



Katharina Grosse has long made work that transcends boundaries; her in-situ installations tread the line between sculpture and painting, installation and experience, and her latest work – commissioned by and created for Fondation Louis Vuitton – is no exception. On display at Espace Louis Vuitton in Venice for the Biennale, Grosse has created a multi-layered, sensory and exploratory piece that reaches back in time while speaking to the present; the installation, called *Apollo Apollo*, takes its cue from Aeschylus's ancient Greek trilogy the *Oresteia*, which charts the rise and fall of the house of Atreus, the victors of the Trojan war. The daughter of the defeated Trojan king, Cassandra, is cursed by the god Apollo, whose advances she has rejected, to give true prophecies that will never be believed. "Cassandra sees something but everyone says she's mad," says Grosse, when I speak to her at the opening of the Biennale. "I thought that was super fascinating."



Apollo Apollo
DANIELE NALESSO

Ways of seeing is a theme that Grosse wanted to explore through various mediums. *Apollo Apollo* is a cascade of iridescent, metallic mesh that bleeds into the space; on the fabric itself the pinks, blues, golds, reds are painted on and meld into each other, representing images that capture Grosse's creative process, taken over a number of years. "The reflectiveness [of the fabric] erases the image that's printed on it," she says. The artist played with warm and cold light to bring out the different layers of the work. "The fact that the light that shines on it actually erases what you see was an interesting paradox."

"Apollo Apollo is about voices that are not heard."

Indeed, Grosse looked to the theme of the Biennale itself, "The Milk of Dreams", a title from a book by the Surrealist artist Leonora Carrington, that refers to a world that is re-envisioned through the imagination, and where everyone can be transformed. "Apollo Apollo is about seeing, but it's also about the voice," says Grosse. "It's also about connecting to the Biennale, exploring the voices that are not heard."



Apollo Apollo
COURTESY

The trope of women who speak but aren't listened to is a theme that resonates strongly in contemporary culture. Is this, I ask, a feminist work? "Cassandra is certainly a feminist voice if you want to read it that way," she says. "She's not believed. She's ignored."

Grosse often finishes works in situ and considered the fact that the audience would have travelled through Venice and the retail space before coming up to the intimate Espace Louis Vuitton on the top floor. "It's like a stage: there's one space, one person – there's that dialogue." It's only on closer inspection that you realise that there are objects under the mesh – a fold-up chair, a pair of shoes. They are almost imperceptible – outlines, impressions of what lies beneath. "The objects themselves are turned into something else within your fantasy. The shoes in there are no longer shoes if you don't walk in them. They are stripped of their functionality. These are objects you might not see straight away, camouflaged by the fabric."



Apollo Apollo
COURTESY

Grosse is currently collaborating on two more installations for Louis Vuitton, one of which is inspired by the architecture of Frank Gehry, who also conceived the original structure for the Fondation. It's rewarding to follow the thread of connection in Grosse's body of work, after all, the ebb and flow of the Apollo Apollo reflects the fluidity in her approach, and the brief from the Fondation was the perfect opportunity to have 'carte blanche' and reinvent the possibilities of the space.



The artist Katharina Grosse
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