

VENUS OVER MANHATTAN

Press Release

ANA BENAROYA: ON HOLY GROUND

Art Basel Hong Kong

March 28 – 30, 2024

Booth 3D18

Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre

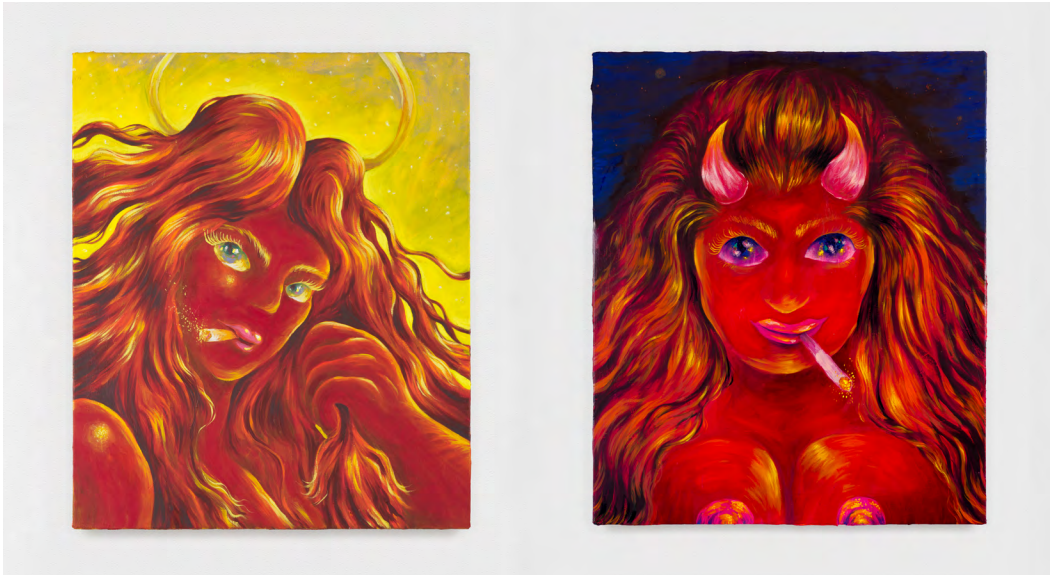
1 Expo Drive, Wan Chai

Hong Kong



(Hong Kong) – For the 2024 edition of **Art Basel Hong Kong**, **Venus Over Manhattan** is pleased to present a solo exhibition of new work by **Ana Benaroya**. Marking the artist's debut solo presentation in Asia, ***On Holy Ground*** comprises paintings made over the last year that engage the iconography of heaven and hell. In these works, she adorns her figures with wings, halos, and horns, exploring a religious iconography that marks a new direction in her practice. Featuring ten works on canvas and a small group of related works on board, *Ana Benaroya: On Holy Ground* will be on view from March 26th through 30th at **Booth 3D18** in the **Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Center**.

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Ana Benaroya's paintings are self-contained universes, full of frolicking women whose bodies ripple with colorfully radiant muscle. In this new body of work, Benaroya transforms her signature subjects—monumental women with pronounced musculatures—into celestial beings. This divine and infernal imagery not only reflects her fascination with temptation and sin; it places her work in dialogue with the complex history of religious art and its portrayal of women. Benaroya reimagines traditional concepts of femininity, purity, and shame, conjuring worlds where judgment gives way to unfettered freedom and a robust, self-assured sexuality. Her work offers a bold reimagining of virtue and feminine form, offering a dynamic vision of empowerment and narrative reinvention.

Drawn to angels and devils as metaphors for purity and immorality, Benaroya reflects on the ubiquitous judgment and sexualization of women across the moral spectrum. She illuminates the flawed binary between the "innocent" and the "temptress"—archetypes that are equally condemned and objectified. In diaphanous environments that blur heaven and hell, her compositions highlight the absurdities of traditional gender roles. Unabashed, her figures embody joy and vitality, defying conventional narratives with their bawdy exuberance.

Acutely attuned to the power of images, Benaroya confronts both traditional and contemporary depictions of femininity in her work. The commercial, highly stylized portrayals of womanhood prevalent in popular media feel distant from her own experience as a queer woman. This distance drives her to reinterpret these artificial poses and imagine spaces where women celebrate their authenticity, free from judgment or shame. By deliberately sidestepping the masculine or capitalist gaze, Benaroya's figures—angels and devils alike—embrace and celebrate their sexuality with bold autonomy. Their world becomes a space of liberation and joy, where their agency is not just asserted but celebrated.

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Benaroya's engagement with religious themes and Christian imagery led her to explore historical and literary works on similar subjects. Reading Milton's *Paradise Lost* while at work on *The Devil May Care*, Benaroya found herself drawn to the poem's complex portrayal of Satan, with his seductive rhetoric and quest for autonomy. This character—a fallen angel cast from heaven for his defiant ambition to create his own world—mirrors themes of self-rule, creativity, and defiance central to Benaroya's work. "He was flung out of heaven for wanting to create something of his own," she says. "Even if it wasn't perfect, he wanted to be a creator. I like to think of him as an artist."

Benaroya takes her own liberties to refigure the world and reframe Christian concepts. In *The Three Wise Women*, she reimagines the classical biblical figures as three towering women whose bodies undulate like smoke, their glossy skin bathed in warm yellow light. *Let There Be Light* presents a striking face emerging from a galaxy of wild hair, a cigarette resting on the woman's rouged lips. Neon glitter bursts in the air around her, juxtaposing the sacred with the gaudy and irreverent.

In *The Angel of History*, Benaroya adopts her title from Paul Klee's monotype *Angelus Novus*, famously referenced by Walter Benjamin in his text *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. Benaroya is captivated by the notion of history as a relentless force propelling us forward. In her rendition of the painting, the angel is set against a backdrop of sparkling pink and red flames. The angel's body pulsates with shocks of vibrant color, and its skin is a scintillating royal blue, accented with surges of red. Benaroya's depiction radiates an intense power, telegraphing the unstoppable momentum of history.

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In her presentation for Art Basel Hong Kong, Benaroya addresses history, heaven, and hell, with a body of work that pushes a cast of unabashed women toward the canon. In her richly imagined worlds, angels and devils flirt and flaunt amid smoky skies as they create new histories. Taken together, Benaroya's works constitute an intoxicating realm where her figures, dazzlingly alive, celebrate their wild and unrestrained exuberance.

ABOUT ANA BENAROYA

Ana Benaroya (b. 1986, New York City, NY) lives and works in Jersey City. She holds a BFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), and an MFA from the Yale University School of Art. Benaroya's work has been the subject of numerous solo presentations, including recent exhibitions at Venus Over Manhattan, New York; Carl Kostyál, Stockholm and London; Ross + Kramer Gallery, New York; Postmasters Gallery, New York; and the Masur Museum, Monroe, Louisiana. Her work features frequently in major group exhibitions both stateside and abroad, including recent presentations at Pilar Corrias, London; Venus Over Manhattan, New York; the Mint Museum, Charlotte; Almine Rech, Paris; Adler Beatty, New York; Allouche Benias Gallery, Athens; and the International Print Center, New York. Benaroya's work is held in the permanent collections of many public institutions, including the Bass Museum, Miami; the High Museum of Art, Atlanta; Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami; the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art, New York; the Mint Museum, Charlotte; the Portland Museum of Art, Portland; the Pérez Art Museum, Miami; and Zuzem Art Centre, Riga, among others.

For further information about the exhibition and availability, please contact the gallery at info@venusovermanhattan.com

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39 Great Jones Street
New York, NY 10012
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GALLERY HOURS

Tuesday – Saturday
10:00 am – 6:00 pm

IMAGE CREDITS

Athene, 2023. Oil on canvas; 51 x 59 in (129.5 x 149.9 cm)

The Perfect Match, 2024. Oil on canvas; 24 x 20 in (61 x 50.8 cm)

The Devil May Care, 2023. Oil on canvas; 24 x 20 in (61 x 50.8 cm)

The Three Wise Women, 2023. Oil on canvas; 62 x 80 in (157.5 x 203.2 cm)

All images of works by Ana Benaroya, courtesy the artist and Venus Over Manhattan, New York.