

NINO MIER GALLERY

NEW YORK | BRUSSELS

Giulia Messina

The statue kissed me but no one was looking at us

Brussels

June 13 – July 19, 2025

*Between the rows of trees on l'Avenue des Gobelins
A marble statue takes me by the hand
Today is Sunday, the cinemas are full
The birds in the branches watch the humans
And the statue kisses me but no one was looking at us
Except for a blind child who points at us.*

(Jacques Prévert, *Dimanche*)

In *The statue kissed me, but no one was looking at us*, Giulia Messina's first exhibition with Nino Mier Gallery in Brussels and her second solo exhibition with the gallery overall, the artist presents a personal and mythologically charged reflection on identity, performance, and vulnerability. Drawing from Ovid's myth of Pygmalion and Galatea, Messina reimagines the tale through a reversal: it is the statue who awakens and kisses the artist, turning her into a statue as well. Yet in this moment of transformation, no one is watching. The result is a poignant commentary on the alienation and emotional invisibility of contemporary life, where relentless individualism blinds us from truly seeing even those closest to us.

The statue, for Messina, becomes a metaphor for emotional paralysis and the societal pressure to appear perfect, composed, and untouchable. It embodies what she calls the "functional freeze": a state of external productivity masking internal immobility. In contrast, the long-explored figure of the mask, both theatrical and symbolic, offers a means of escape: Messina's use of masking becomes a method to transcend constraint. Her drag alter ego, Naughty Galatea, emerges from this space of reinvention. Born out of a prolonged entanglement with her Italian academic discipline and classical heritage, the persona allows Messina to tackle rigid norms around behaviour and self-image with irreverence and humour, yet without abandoning the fragility that underpins them. In this context, she turned to still lifes as a way to avoid academic conventions and the representation of the body, perceived as a cage imposed by her Italian education.

Central to the exhibition is the tension between stillness and activation. The show itself is conceived as an ongoing performance: drawings evolve, installations shift, and Messina's interventions will transform the gallery space during the course of the exhibition. Her desire is not only to exhibit but to provoke and to connect. "*I want to keep the show alive,*" she says, "*to have more occasions to connect people, to make memorable moments of lightness and awareness.*" These gestures, at the same time intimate and theatrical, mirror her broader aim: to dismantle alienation and foster presence—an intention that also informs the idea of disinhibition through parties, as a way to move beyond disconnection.

As with her earlier work, the new drawings build on Messina's immersive table-setting performances, where food, bodies, and image merge. These hybrid gatherings that are part dinner, part performance and part ritual, explore the intersection of sensuality and social roles. Her guests are invited to come in costume or adopt a character, and must navigate absurd rituals that destabilise their usual behaviours, or are confronted with their own image in mirrors to establish their adopted identity further. In these

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moments of shared absurdity, tightly held roles unravel, and joy becomes an act of liberation. The aftermath of these performances is preserved in large, vibrant and colourful still lifes, created with marker pens. A precise and timeconsuming practice, that demands for deep focus and offers a fleeting escape from our ever attention-demanding society.

In this new body of work, Messina introduces a formal evolution. Subtly departing from the densely layered compositions of her past, she now allows space for silence, as can be clearly seen in *Broken fig hearted statue* (2025). The *horror vacui* that once dominated her visual language gives way to intentional white space, a nod to the statue's cold stillness, but also a gesture toward control, vulnerability, and perfectionism. These unmarked zones are not mere emptiness, but are an invitation to pause, to reflect, and to witness what is not immediately visible.

Ultimately, the title of the exhibition goes beyond being a label: it is its emotional pulse. It speaks to moments of transformation that unfold unseen, to the intimacy of performance and the tension between stillness and becoming. Giulia Messina's work reminds us that masks can reveal as much as they hide, that stillness can be a form of resistance, and that the most radical awakenings often happen quietly, outside the spotlight.

Giulia Messina (b. 1998, lives and works in Brussels, BE) studied at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels, BE and the Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera in Milan, IT. Messina has had solo exhibitions at Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, US; Coulisse Gallert, Stockholm, SE, L.U.P.O, Milan, IT; Spazio Specific, Milan, IT and Martos Gallery, New York, NY, US. Recent group exhibitions were held at Stems, Brussels, BE; Hypha Studios, London, UK; Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, US; Volery Gallery, Dubai, UAE; and Carl Kostyal, Milan, IT.