

GOWEN
GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

**WITH
MY
BODY**

Bruno Gadenne
Ayana V. Jackson
Roméo Mivekannin
Sophie Ryder
Marta Zgierska

Press Release |

September 18 - November 1 | 2025

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*Public opening: September 18, from 5pm to 8pm

*Opening in conjunction with Art en Vieille-Ville (AVV) vernissages en commun and Geneva Art Week.

This Autumn, GOWEN is excited to unveil ***With my Body***, a group exhibition centred around a deliberate artistic choice: each of the five international artists featured in the show uses their own body as a means of representation and particular enquiry. While the works are rooted in their individual exposure, they move far beyond the conventional notion of self-portraiture.

Through this embodied approach, the artists channel complex, experiential storytelling - personal, political, emotional - in which the body becomes equally a site of presence, projection and imagination. Despite their contrasting visual languages, techniques, and themes, they are connected by this shared commitment to the body as medium, expression and meaning.

With a broad range of technique spanning painting, photography and sculpture, the works explore universal themes connecting memory of history, generational representation, the natural environment, mythology, spirituality, human experience, trauma and beauty.



Courtesy of Bruno Gadenne and GOWEN. © Bruno Gadenne

Bruno Gadenne, *Le bassin vert*, 2021, Oil on canvas, 130 x 160 cm.

Often present in the atmospheric scapes of French artist **Bruno Gadenne** (b. 1990) is the nude male figure, featuring the artist himself. Travelling solo and spending extended periods in remote, untamed environments, Gadenne draws directly from these lived experiences to create paintings that open up disconcerting, almost oneiric portals into landscapes that are as much psychological as they are physical. Primal and uncanny, these scenes allude to a pre-civilized state of being, an exploration of the origins of humanity, of man alone in nature.

His mastery of light, especially through the use of *nuit américaine* (day-for-night technique), blurs temporal and perceptual boundaries. The viewer is suspended in liminal moments, between sunset and nightfall, between dream and wakefulness, when the mind begins to surrender to instinct, memory, and imagination.

As Gadenne explains, *"I feel more legitimate depicting my own body in the paintings, which are stories I'm telling myself, first and foremost. I travel and live alone so it's easier to work with myself as the model. There is also the idea of solitude or loneliness present in some of my paintings."*

Bruno Gadenne's work resonates beyond its formal beauty or technical finesse. His paintings offer a radical reimagining of the male body: not as dominant or heroic, but as elemental, isolated, reflective. By inserting himself into these wildernesses, the artist collapses the boundary between self and landscape, suggesting that identity is not fixed, but continually shaped by solitude, nature, and the unconscious. In doing so, Gadenne not only reclaims the male nude from its historic idealization, but positions it within a contemporary context of introspection and existential inquiry. His work stands as a quiet yet powerful meditation on embodiment, belonging, and the often fragile link between humanity and the natural world.

American photographer **Ayana V. Jackson** (b. 1977, New Jersey), a descendant of one of the earliest African families to settle in the northeastern United States, explores the construction of racial and gender identity through photography. Her work critically examines the role of historical imagery, particularly 19th and early 20th century black portraiture, in shaping the Western gaze and reinforcing colonial and white male-dominated narratives. Drawing on archival material and sociological research, Jackson challenges these visual legacies by staging her own body within meticulously composed portraits that function as both re-appropriations and counter-narratives.

By reversing the perspective traditionally imposed on the black body, often exoticized, primitivized, or reduced to ethnographic spectacle, Jackson reclaims agency. In her seminal series *The Becoming Subject*, she disrupts dominant iconographies by embodying a multiplicity of historically silenced identities. Her use of self-portraiture is not merely personal; it is political and transformative. Her own body becomes a site of inquiry, resistance, and representation, in which she simultaneously performs, directs, and captures each image.

This commitment to using her own body as the sole subject continues in her more recent work, particularly in *From the Deep: In the Wake of Drexciya*, a central focus of the current exhibition. Developed during a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship and recently shown at the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art in Washington, D.C., the series expands her practice into the realm of speculative mythology and collective memory.

Inspired by *Drexciya*, a myth conceived in the 1990s by Detroit-based techno duo James Stinson and Gerald Donald, Jackson imagines an underwater civilization descended from pregnant African women who were thrown or jumped overboard during the transatlantic slave trade. She transforms this narrative of tragedy into one of resistance and rebirth, constructing what the Smithsonian described as "an immersive, feminist, and sacred aquatopia" inhabited by powerful African water spirits - Olokun, Yemayá, Mame Coumba Bang - who midwife and protect the Drexciyans.



Ayana V. Jackson, *Sea Lion*, 2019, Archival pigment print on German etching paper, 156 x 110 cm.

Drawing on iconography of West African water deities - particularly the Mami Watas - Jackson's imagery reflects research conducted during travels across Angola, Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria, and the wider Gulf of Guinea. Her collaboration with Senegalese designer Rama Diew brings together embroidered textiles, feathers, Dutch wax fabrics, and recycled plastics. These materials are not merely decorative: they function as protective layers, symbolic of both ecological awareness and spiritual safeguarding.

In Jackson's complex compositions, references to precolonial textile exchanges, such as those between Portugal and Senegal, intertwine with art historical codes of portraiture. By evoking the aesthetics of aristocratic or royal portraiture, she simultaneously honours African histories and critiques their erasure or complicity in colonial systems. Her work thus moves seamlessly between reverence and confrontation, intimacy and mythology, self and collective memory, merging historical consciousness with fantastical reimaginings of survival and sovereignty.

In a direct collaboration with the artist, this exhibition features works from several of her most critical series dating back to 2011, alongside four recent pieces newly edited for the show.

The practice of **Roméo Mivekannin** (b. 1986, Bouaké, Ivory Coast) engages with themes of memory, identity, and the legacy of colonialism through powerful reinterpretations of Western art historical imagery. Working primarily in painting and installation, he draws upon archival materials to expose the colonial gaze imposed over the historically underrepresented, erased (the non-dits), or unspoken narratives. At the heart of his work lies what he calls the "memory of history", a literal and symbolic engagement with the past as a means of critical reckoning and reappropriation.

Two seminal exhibitions in Paris profoundly shaped Mivekannin's artistic inquiry: *L'invention du sauvage* (Musée du Quai Branly, 2011) and *Le modèle noir de Géricault à Matisse* (Musée d'Orsay, 2019). These encounters led him to question not only his personal history but also the broader essentialization and objectification of African identity within the Western canon. His response is both intimate and confrontational: through a process he describes as "visual irritation", Mivekannin intervenes in historical artworks by replacing the original subjects' faces with his own black-and-white portrait. This unflinching gaze reclaims presence and agency for figures long rendered passive, commodified, or invisible, forcing viewers into a direct engagement with the power dynamics embedded with the works.

Mivekannin's portraits revisit iconic Western works such as *Olympia* by Édouard Manet, slave market scenes by Jean-Léon Gérôme, and 19th-century colonial photographs. Through these appropriations, he critically examines how the black body has been depicted in Western white dominant visual culture, primarily through the lens of slavery, colonial domination, and exoticism.



Roméo Mivekannin, *Kimono Rouge* after George Hendrik Breitner, 2024, Acrylic and elixir bath on canvas, 200 x 240 cm.

As Mivekannin states:

"It's political because it speaks to the construction of my body in relation to otherness. A body that has been subjected, terrorized, stereotyped, commodified, dominated, because enslavement passed through it. I wondered: how can I live with this body, which automatically projects an image that is not mine? How can I go on knowing that the being I am doesn't correspond to the image I give, or that others perceive? How can I live with this body that is not me?"

Mivekannin's canvases are often crafted from found materials, such as used bedsheets, traditional batik fabrics, and burlap, soaked in mixtures of pigments, spices, and elixirs inspired by Beninese voodoo rituals. This process imbues the works with profound spiritual and ancestral resonance, transforming the surface into a site of both ritual and resistance. He then paints with acrylic, creating high-contrast compositions that disrupt familiar historical scenes and assert new narratives.

In what he calls both an homage and an effraction, a respectful tribute and a deliberate intrusion, Mivekannin inserts himself into the pictorial frame "like a forgotten black figure." This act becomes a gesture of reclamation, challenging viewers with his gaze to ask: Who paints? Who is painted? Who is present in the image, and who is absent?

Ultimately, Mivekannin's work is an act of repair. Through a complex layering of materials, memory, and self-representation, he reframes the visual history of the black body, offering a contemporary space for healing, resistance, and reflection.

The contemporary practice of **Sophie Ryder** (b. 1963, London) draws inspiration from mythology and the natural world, weaving timeless narratives with personal storytelling. Certain themes and archetypal figures, often hybrids, such as the Lady Hare and the Minotaur, emerge as iconic, recurring motifs in her work, serving as powerful symbols for exploring the human experience. For the Lady Hare, the human parts are based on the artist's own body.

Dealing with identity, the interplay between masculine and feminine energies, and the dynamics of human relationships, Ryder's sculptures are a striking reflection of her artistic language and conceptual inquiry, embodying her ongoing exploration of form and meaning, particularly through her mastery of wire, a medium she has embraced as one of her primary means of expression.

Sophie Ryder's work stands out for its emotional resonance and its ability to bridge the mythic with the deeply personal. Her reflective approach invites viewers to question the boundaries between human and animal, strength and vulnerability, self and other. As one of the few contemporary sculptors to consistently bring to the fore hybrid mythology through such an idiosyncratic material language, her practice remains vital to conversations about identity, embodiment, and the enduring relevance of myth in contemporary art.



© Sophie Ryder

Sophie Ryder, *Girl With Knees Up*, 2019, Galvanised Steel Wire Sculpture, 6.096 x 2.90 x 4.71 m.

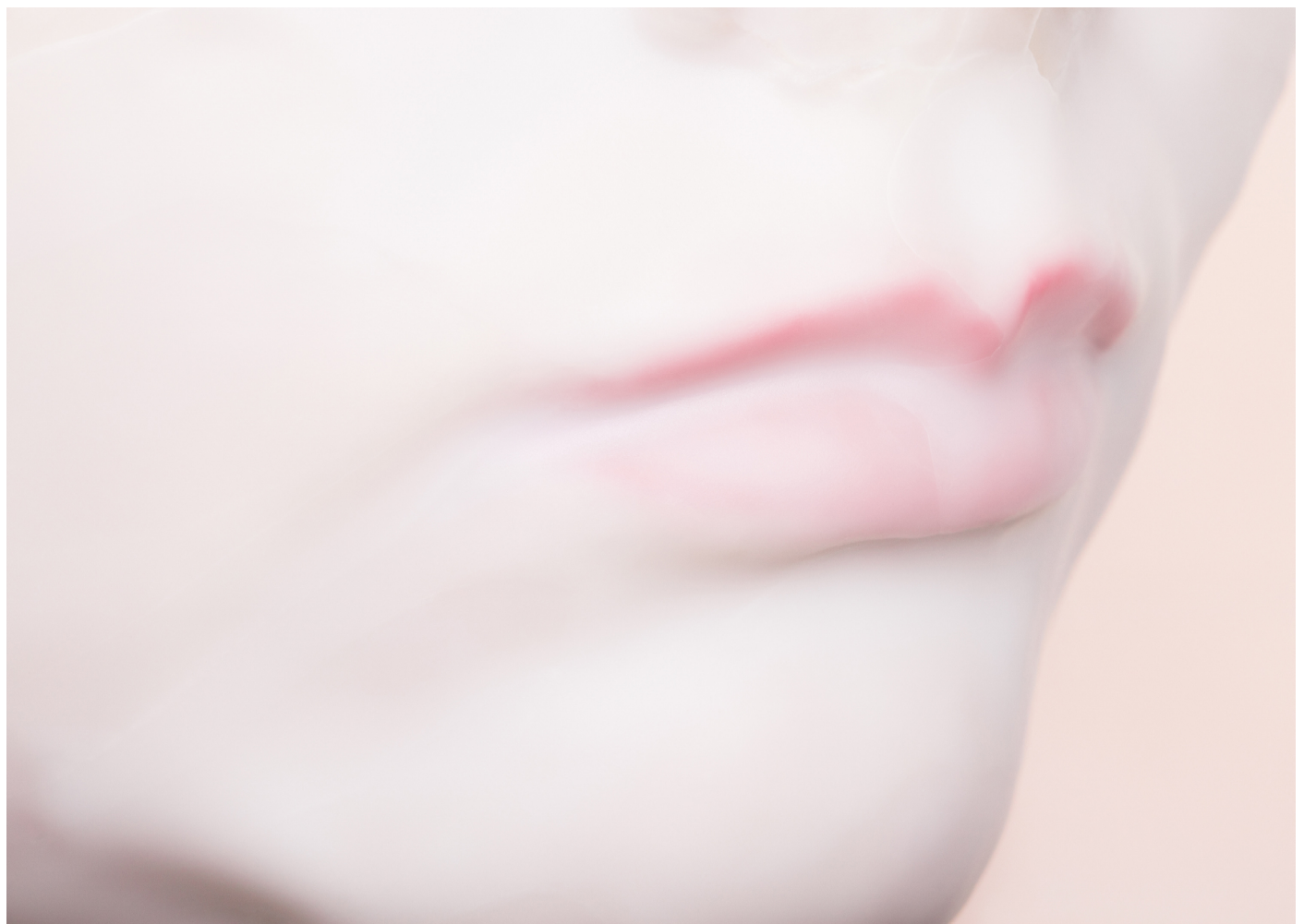
Through a practice rooted in performance and photography, **Marta Zgierska** (b. 1987, Lublin) creates a deeply introspective body of work in which her own body is the only one ever represented. This radical, consistent choice transforms her entire oeuvre into a complex form of self-portraiture, sometimes direct, sometimes abstracted or conceptually reframed. Her visual language, minimal and precise, emerged following a life-altering event: a serious car accident in 2013 that profoundly redefined her relationship to image-making.

Out of this trauma came the critically acclaimed *Post* series (2016), which marked a turning point in her practice. Each photograph metaphorically evokes a fragment of personal history through a clinical, restrained aesthetic. These frozen, nearly silent images articulate a visual language of survival, stripped to its bare essentials. The body, here, is both archive and instrument, at once a site of fragility and resistance.

Subsequent series reflect a shift in focus, from internal pain toward broader societal critique, while still anchoring the work in Zgierska's own figure. In *Afterbeauty*, the self-portrait becomes abstract: she constructs sculptural forms from used facial masks, applied repeatedly to her own skin until they cause harm. These objects, photographed in sparse compositions, embody the physical and psychological toll of beauty rituals. The body, though absent, remains present—transformed into material, stripped of identity and gender, reduced to pure form.

This tension is carried further in *Votive Figure* (2019), where Zgierska covers her body in a wax shell, turning herself into an offering to what she calls a modern deity: beauty. As she explains,

"In the modern world, beauty is a god. A divinity who demands frequent sacrifices. I make votive wax figures to implore the divinity to make me beautiful. By covering my own body with a wax shell, I myself become a votive figure. I am making a sacrifice of my body to this new god."



Courtesy of Marta Zgierska and GOWEN. © Marta Zgierska

Marta Zgierska, *Votive Figure I*, 2019, Pigment print, Hahnemühle Photo Rag Pearl, mounted on Dibond, framed with wooden oak frame with a glass, 57.2 x 80 cm.



Zgierska's work reflects on how, in today's world, the body - and particularly the female form - has become a commodity, subjected to endless performance and commodification. Yet by using her body as both subject and medium, she does not disappear. Rather, she confronts this reality head-on, transforming personal vulnerability into a powerful critique of contemporary ideals. Her practice stands as a visceral, unflinching meditation on survival, image, and the cost of conformity.

Marta Zgierska, *Untitled*, from the *Post* series, 2014, Dibond photograph, 80 x 57.2 cm.

Around 30 works are included in the exhibition including from private collections.

The gallery would like to extend its thanks to Galerie Barbara Thumm for their kind cooperation.

Running in parallel with the exhibition, the gallery will host a solo presentation by **Alexandra Häberli** at GOWEN LAB, its second space at Rue Jean-Calvin 4.

For more information visit:

Website: gowen.art

Instagram: @gowencontemporary

Bruno Gadenne

Bruno Gadenne (b. 1990, France) lives and works in Paris and Guéret. After studying in Sèvres (FR) and Boston (USA), Bruno attained his Master of Fine Arts in 2014 at the HEAR, Strasbourg (formerly École Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs de Strasbourg). He had his first solo exhibition the same year in Strasbourg, with Bertrand Gilig Gallery. Prizes & recognition: November International Painting Prize, Vitry (2016); Icart Prize (2017); winner Théophile Schuler Prize (2018). Guest of honour at the Salon des Artistes of Massy (2019). Solo exhibitions: (upcoming) solo show, Galerie Prima, Paris, FR (2025); Dumonteil Gallery, Shanghai, China (2024 & 2022); Le Feuvre & Roze, Paris (2023); Galerie Provost-Hacker, Lille, France (2021); agnès b. Gallery, Paris (2019) & New York, USA (2019). Group exhibitions: *Sans armure*, GOWEN, Geneva, CH; *MINERALIA*, Art et géologie, Maison des Arts, Antony, FR; *Sous la main*, le monde, Galerie Robert Dantec, Nantes, FR (2025); Musée de l'Air et de l'Espace, Le Bourget, FR; *Making the Landscape*, GOWEN, Geneva, CH (2024); and private galleries in France and internationally. Bruno Gadenne has been represented by GOWEN since 2024.

Ayana V. Jackson

Ayana V. Jackson (b. 1977, East Orange, New Jersey) lives and works between Brooklyn, NY and Johannesburg, South Africa. Her work is collected by major international institutions including: The Museum of Fine Arts Boston (Boston, MA), The Indianapolis Museum of Art (Newfields, IN), The Studio Museum in Harlem (New York, NY), The Newark Museum (Newark, NJ), J.P. Morgan Chase Art Collection (New York, NY), Princeton University Art Museum (Princeton, NJ), The National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne, Australia), The Museum of Contemporary Photography (Chicago, IL) and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Seattle, WA). Jackson was a 2014 New York Foundation for the Arts Fellow in Photography and the recipient of the 2018 Smithsonian Fellowship. In 2021, she founded STILL Art, an artist residency program in Johannesburg that supports emerging contemporary artists of all disciplines from Southern Africa. Her first major institutional exhibition, *From the Deep: In the Wake of Drexciya*, opened at the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art in April 2023. Two years later, her first major European exhibition opened in April 2025 at the Museo de Antropología in Madrid. Ayana V. Jackson is represented by Mariane Ibrahim Gallery, Chicago. GOWEN has exhibited Ayana V. Jackson since 2019.

Roméo Mivekannin

Roméo Mivekannin (b. 1986, Bouaké, Ivory Coast) Born in Bouaké, Ivory Coast Lives and works between Toulouse, France and Cotonou, Benin. Since 2017 Doctorate in progress at the École Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Montpellier, France, 2015 Graduate of the École Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Toulouse, France. Solo exhibitions: 2025 - *O Avesso do Tempo*, Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia, Salvador de Bahia, Brazil; *Atlas*, Art Basel Unlimited, Basel, Switzerland; *Spleen*, Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin, Germany; *Black Mirror*, Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia, Italy; *Roméo Mivekannin*, Kunsthalle Giessen, Giessen, Germany (upcoming November); Fondation H, Antananarivo, Madagascar (upcoming Sep); 2024 - *L'Envers du Temps*, Musée du Louvre Lens, France; *Human in motion*, Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin, Germany; 2022 - *Effractions*, Galerie Cécile Fakhoury, Abidjan, Ivory Coast; 2021 - *Hosties noires*, Galerie Cécile Fakhoury, Dakar, Senegal Béhanzin, Galerie Eric Dupont, Paris, France; 2020 - *Les Âmes du Peuple Noir*, Galerie Cécile Fakhoury, Abidjan, Ivory Coast; *Peaux noires, masques blancs*, Galerie Eric Dupont, Paris, France; 2016 - *Forêt de ville*, Atelier A, Toulouse, France. Group exhibitions: 2025 - *When We See Us*, Bozar Center for Fine Arts, Brussels, Belgium; *Rois et Reines d'Afrique : formes et figures du pouvoir*, Louvre Abu Dhabi, UAE; Gillet et Compagnie, Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris, France; 2024 - *When We See Us*, Kunstmuseum Basel, Basel Switzerland; *The True Size of Africa*, Völklinger Hütte, Völklingen, Germany; *15 Jahre Villa Schöningen*, Villa Schöningen, Berlin, Germany; *Exiles. Regards d'Artistes* Musée du Louvre Lens, France; *Dig Where You Stand*, Fondation Zinsou Musée, Ouidah & Les Ateliers Coffi, Cotonou, Benin; *Signifying the Impossible Song*, Southern Guild, Los Angeles, USA; *Mythologies*, Ville de Saint-Raphaël, Saint-Raphaël, France; *Révélation!* Art Contemporain du Bénin, La Conciergerie, Paris, France; 2023 - *Can You Feel The Space That Space Occupies*, Galerie Cécile Fakhoury, Dakar, Senegal; International Exhibition of Contemporary Textiles, Vilnius, Lithuania; *Une autre Histoire du Monde*, Mucem, Marseille, France; Sharjah Biennial 15: *Thinking Historically in the Present*, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates; *When We See Us*, Zeitz Mocaa, Cape Town, South Africa; *Senghor et les arts : Réinventer l'universel*, Musée du Quai Branly, Paris, France; Picasso: Sin Título, La Casa Encendida, Madrid, Spain; 2022 - *Imagine !*, Musée Bargoin, Clermont-Ferrand, France; *Contextile*, Paço dos duques, Saison croisée France-Portugal, Guimaraes, Portugal;

ExodeS, Centre Culturel, Saint-Raphaël, France; *Horizons d'eaux #6*, Former paper mill site, Montech, France; *Ce que le monde doit à la nuit*, Galerie Cécile Fakhoury, Paris, France; *Regarde-moi*, Galerie Perrotin, Paris, France; Biennale de Dakar, Official Selection, Ancien Palais de Justice, Cap Manuel, Dakar, Senegal; *Prenez garde à la peinture !*, Galerie Eric Dupont, Paris, France; *Picasso Remix*, Galerie Le Manège, Dakar, Senegal; 2021 - *Traversées Africaines*, l'Enseigne des Oudin - Fonds de dotation, Paris, France; *Magies-Sorcelleries*, Muséum de Toulouse, Toulouse, France; *La déconniatrie*, Musée des Abbatoirs, Toulouse, France; Zoo Humain : *Au temps des exhibitions coloniales*, Curated by Pascal Blanchard, AfricaMuseum, Tervuren, Belgium; *ALEPH*, Galerie Eric Dupont, Paris, France. Roméo Mivekannin's work can be found in numerous international collections. He is represented by Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin. This is the artist's first collaboration with GOWEN.

Sophie Ryder

Sophie Ryder (b. 1963, London, England) studied Combined Arts at the Royal Academy of Arts from 1981-84, and was the youngest student after JMW Turner to be admitted. Her work has been shown worldwide including: Yorkshire Sculpture Park, UK; Blickachsen, Germany; Frederik Meijer Sculpture Park, USA; Pilane, Sweden and Salisbury Cathedral, UK. In summer 2023, to celebrate the artist's 60th year, a series of Sophie Ryder events and exhibitions were held including open air sculpture at RHS Wisley and Chelsea Barracks, UK. The Lightbox gallery and museum in Woking, Surrey hosted a major retrospective entitled *All of Us* which included over 50 works spanning a career of 30 years. Two of the artist's monumental sculptures, *Girl With Knees Up*, 2019 and *Sitting Minotaur*, 2020 were presented as a special project by GOWEN gallery at Art Paris 2025 to critical acclaim. Sophie Ryder has been represented by GOWEN since 2024.

Marta Zgierska

Marta Zgierska (b. 1987 Lublin, Poland) is a PhD candidate in the field of Intermedia. She holds a MFA in Photography (Polish National Film School in Lodz), a MA in Theatrology and a MA in Social Communication and Journalism. Marta is the recipient of a number of scholarships and the author of award-winning works and books on art. In 2016 she was awarded the Prix HSBC pour la Photographie, in 2018 she was nominated for the Foam Paul Huf Award and the DZ BANK Art Collection Fellowship in 2019. Marta is also Editor-in-chief of *Postmedium*, a magazine dedicated to the presentation of texts by visual artists. Her works have been exhibited in numerous museums, galleries, and festivals and can be viewed in her current solo show at the Municipal BWA Gallery, Bydgoszcz, Poland. She was a participating artist in the 2024 Fotofestival Lenzburg, Switzerland. Zgierska lives and works in Warsaw, Poland. She has been represented by GOWEN, Geneva since 2016.