

# Pilar Corrias

Press Release

Ella Walker  
*The Romance of the Rose*  
11 Sept–9 Nov 2024

Pilar Corrias  
2 Savile Row  
London W1S 3PA



Ella Walker, *The Bridled Sweeties*, 2024, detail. Courtesy the artist and Pilar Corrias, London

+44 (0)20 7323 7000  
info@pilarcorrias.com

51 Conduit Street  
London W1S 2YT

2 Savile Row  
London W1S 3PA

For all press enquiries,  
please contact:  
Katrina Millar  
+44 (0)7769 775 651  
katrina@pilarcorrias.com

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## Press Release

Pilar Corrias is pleased to present a solo exhibition of new paintings by artist Ella Walker at its Savile Row gallery.

For her first exhibition with the gallery, Walker intricately weaves imagery from broad swathes of history and popular culture – medieval manuscripts to modern ballet, the cinema of Fellini and Pasolini to fetishwear magazines – to produce emotive, stage-like scenes. Interrogating traditional depictions of women throughout art history, Walker's paintings offer a counterpoint to the traditional casting of female subjects as exemplars of vice and virtue. Freed from this moral framework, her figures are recalibrated, reentering the world of images as complex, contradictory, unruly beings.

The exhibition takes as its point of departure the thirteenth-century French poem, *The Romance of the Rose*, in which a lover hunts for an object to love. The allegorical tale of courtly love is replete with patriarchal language – the repeated references to 'plucking' the perfect 'rosebud' underscore the imperativeness of feminine chastity and the process of deflowering as a chivalrous project. As he attempts to navigate love's true course, the narrator encounters a series of generic female characters representing various vices, including Idleness, Avarice, Hatred and Envy, all of whom serve as cautionary obstacles. In Walker's compositions, however, this chorus of archetypes are relieved of their duties. Each figure becomes self-sufficient, with their own interior life.

Characters who have been overlooked or undermined traditionally now take centre stage: the stock *commedia dell'arte* character of the *servetta*, the jealous crone, the madwoman, the glee-maiden and sorceress; in short, uncontrollable, insolent women whose example we are not meant to follow. Cheeky, mask-like faces leer out from the canvas; a fist pummels the floor in a state of protest. In *The Bridled Sweeties* (2024), a Maria Callas lookalike rolls her eyes back into her head, in what could be an expression of delirium, orgasm, or simply boredom.

Walker's transhistorical approach is mirrored in her use of materials and techniques, where light washes of acrylic dispersion, pigment, chalk and marble dust commingle upon a textured ground. Employing the spatial logics of fresco and its shallow depth of field, the refined line work and luminosity of the artist's paintings recall Piero della Francesca, while the

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architectural planes and costume design evoke Giorgio de Chirico. Unifying historic and contemporary narratives and materials within a single picture plane, Walker reinjects a joyful spirit of punk feminism back into the past, a freedom that allows the messy woman all the levity, comedy and complexity she merits.

**Ella Walker** (b. 1993, Manchester, UK) lives and works in London. The artist received her BA in Painting and Printmaking from The Glasgow School of Art, Glasgow, before joining The Royal Drawing School, London, where she earned a Postgraduate Diploma in 2018. Recent solo exhibitions include: *After great pain, a formal feeling comes*, Casey Kaplan, New York (2024); *Chorus*, Kestner Gesellschaft, Hanover, Germany (2023) and *Distant Conversations: Ella Walker and Betty Woodman*, Currier Museum of Art, Manchester, New Hampshire (2023). Selected group exhibitions include: *Present Tense*, Hauser and Wirth Somerset, UK (2024); *Where the threads are worn*, Casey Kaplan, New York (2021); *Fertile Laziness*, Platform Southwark, London, UK (2021) and *Bathing nervous limbs*, Edinburgh Art Festival, Arusha Gallery, Edinburgh, UK (2021).

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