

Theodora Allen

Pierce the Valley

17.03.2026
28.03.2026

MASSIMODECARLO Pièce Unique is very pleased to present *Pierce the Valley*, an exhibition of new paintings by American artist Theodora Allen. This marks Allen's first presentation in Paris.

Over the past decade, Allen has developed a distinct visual language attuned to the power of symbols and their cycles of regeneration, transformation, and persistence. The suite of works in *Pierce the Valley* reflects the artist's sustained engagement with a process-based method of painting that has remained a defining and generative aspect of her practice—a strategy through which image, subject, and surface are simultaneously constructed and subtly dismantled.

Across her oeuvre, a sense of personal and collective vulnerability unfolds, particularly within the tension between culture and nature—an axis along which ancestral and mythological references converge with the ecological urgencies of the present. Images that carry a strata of time—symbols drawn from playing cards, body armor, and shields—appear as mutable forms, at once physical and psychological. Heart and diamond shapes mirror and partition one another, diagramming an enigmatic origin story. A worm tunnels through an apple, an agent of both decay and regeneration, while two monumental drill bits stand poised to enact violence upon an already barren landscape. Through the slow alchemy of her process, luminous archetypal forms emerge from fields of blue and grey, binding the physical to the metaphysical; the terrestrial to the celestial.

Painting on gessoed linen in a restrained palette of cool tones, Allen constructs her compositions by way of revision. Layers of paint are added and removed, gradually revealing the white ground beneath. With a soft, burnishing action, areas of luminosity are alternately revealed or dimmed. Within this oscillation between presence and absence, the negative shapes that comprise the underpainting gradually take shape as dimensional forms in space. The illusion of the image is frequently interrupted by abrasions that reveal the painting's physical surface: scoured

highlights and precise lines of lifted pigment dissolve and cut through the painted image, disrupting the seduction of illusion.

The result is a shimmering threshold between the visible and the imagined.

In their quiet atmosphere and disciplined symmetry, the works suggest that while human monuments fracture and ideologies erode, the generative forces of the universe continue their cycles within a broader, timeless order. Ruin becomes a threshold that gives way to transformation. Fracture itself becomes revelatory, exposing symbolic structures that have accompanied humanity since its earliest civilizations. Allen's paintings resist fixed interpretation, remaining deliberately open-ended and inviting viewers to project their own meanings and cultural frameworks. Within this ambiguity, forces and energies appear to break apart and re-form in a slow rhythm. The paintings become apertures through which collapse and germination coexist within a single, breathing surface.

-Elisa Carollo

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Theodora Allen (b. 1985, Los Angeles, California) holds an MFA in Painting from the University of California, Los Angeles (2014) and a BFA in Painting from ArtCenter College of Design, Pasadena, CA (2009). She attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture residency program in Skowhegan, ME (2011). Allen's work has been the subject of solo museum exhibitions at Kunsthall Aarhus, Aarhus, Denmark (2021); Driehaus Museum, Chicago, IL (2022); and Huset for Kunst & Design, Holstebro, Denmark (2023). Her paintings have also been included in exhibitions at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, MO (2024), and the Museum of Contemporary Art Tucson, Tucson, AZ (2014). In 2026, a large-scale public work will be installed at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AR, as part of its Art Everywhere program. A monograph on Allen's work, *Saturnine*, was published in 2021 in conjunction with her exhibition at Kunsthall Aarhus. Her work is held in public collections including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA, and the Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX.

Elisa Carollo

Elisa Carollo is an art advisor, curator, art writer and USPAP-compliant appraiser who focuses on contemporary and ultra-contemporary art. Since June 2024, she has been writing about the art market and exhibitions for Observer New York as their main Art reporter. As a curator, Carollo was part of the curatorial team for the inaugural edition of the Malta Biennale held in 2024. She has also been part of the curatorial group for Fondazione Quadriennale to monitor the Italian contemporary art scene and part of the curatorial team for the Italian Pavilion at the 14th Gwangju Biennale (2023). Carollo is a member of the IKT (International Association of Curators of Contemporary Art) and curates various

exhibitions in collaboration with galleries in different countries, aiming to function as a connector, facilitate the global circulation of valuable talents and introduce artists in new regions.

Artworks

The Quarry (Vampire), 2025
Watercolor and oil on linen
147.3 × 114.3 cm / 58 × 45 inches

Armor, 2025
Oil on linen
66 × 50.8 cm / 26 × 20 inches

Locust, 2026
Oil on linen
66 × 50.8 cm / 26 × 20 inches

Shield I (For WPC), 2026
Oil on linen
50.8 x 40.6 cm / 20 x 16 inches

Shield II (For WPC), 2026
Oil on linen
50.8 x 40.6 cm / 20 x 16 inches

The Apple and the Worm II, 2026
Oil on linen
40.6 x 40.6 cm / 16 x 16 inches