

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Alexander Tovborg
Beyond Devotion

Blum & Poe, Tokyo
May 21–July 2, 2022
Opening reception: 6–8pm, May 21, 2022

Tokyo, Japan, May 11, 2022—Blum & Poe is pleased to present *Beyond Devotion*, an exhibition of new paintings and sculpture by Copenhagen-based artist Alexander Tovborg. This marks the artist's fourth solo presentation with the gallery.

In *Beyond Devotion*, Alexander Tovborg continues expounding on the morphology of the great archetypes already associated with his artistic identity. Throughout the sculptures and paintings that make up the exhibition, Tovborg has seamlessly interwoven symbols of Christianity, mysticism, mythology, astrology, and botany. Without the constraints of chronology, temporality, science, or naturalism, Tovborg is able to move freely between these disparate, symbolic realms.

Tovborg's deployment of Christian iconography simultaneously offers viewers a means of entry into his complex and idiosyncratic visual language and serves as a means of critiquing the patriarchal history of the church. In *dea madonna with rainbow crown (night)* (2021) a mother is shown cradling her child. This pastel and acrylic work represents Tovborg's contribution to the most recognizable example of Christian iconography: the Virgin Mary holding Christ in her arms. In Tovborg's variation, however, the infant Christ is depicted as Dea, the daughter of God. This subversive reimagining of the central narrative of Christianity sees Dea taking the place of Christ.

The *dea madonna* series references the long tradition of Italian religious icons, drawing on both the Venetian style and the work of Renaissance painter Giovanni Bellini. An icon's power stems from its spiritual function; it is an object of healing that possesses a small part of the deity that it honors. It is a work that faithful believers turn toward for comfort and reassurance. Tovborg's interest in the practical elements of religious art is exemplified in *dea madonna as baptismal font* (2021–2022), a sculpture of a woman with a concave crown. The work's title reveals its intended function: the iron statue is a vessel used in the ritual of the christening, one of the seven sacraments of the Catholic church.

Alongside these symbols of Christianity, Tovborg explores the more esoteric worlds of mysticism, mythology, and astrology. In *dante as dinosaur with sunflower* (2021) and *dante as dinosaur with tulip* (2021–2022), the viewer is lured in by a mystical figure. It has the head and upper body of a boy and the lower body of a dinosaur, reminiscent of the centaur of Greek mythology. Tovborg's fascination with hybridity is also apparent in *scorpio woman in nature* (2021). In this painting, a creature with the body of a woman and the tail of a scorpion fills the canvas in a swirl of color. The segmented parts of her venomous tail are visually paralleled in the headpieces worn by the downward facing women in, among other works, *scorpio madonna with sunflower* (2021) and *the scorpio madonna* (2021). Through their titles, these paintings' connection to astrology becomes evident to the viewer. The woman depicted is Tovborg's partner, whose star sign is Scorpio—a sign known for creativity, secrecy, and fierce loyalty to those they find dearest to them.

The last symbolic realm Tovborg explores in this body of work is that of the botanical. Throughout the exhibition, the image of the sunflower serves as a recurring motif. In *sunflowers of fukushima* (2021), the flowers appear as a visual tribute to Japanese ingenuity and the culture's devotion to plants. In the wake of the

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Fukushima nuclear disaster, the locals were reported to have planted sunflowers: a species known for its ability to fight the damaging consequences of exposure to toxic radioactive waste. The therapeutic potential of the sunflower is also central to the *dea madonna* series. Tovborg's Madonna figure holds the sunflower protectively and adoringly, as if she's deeply aware of its restorative powers. For the artist, the sunflower holds the same power as the icon—it heals.

In this body of work, Tovborg has focused his creative inquiries on the people closest to him: his family. Viewing these works provides a glimpse into the artist's familial experience, one that is further enhanced by Tovborg's use of medium. He avidly paints on bed linen, adding both a literal and allegorical layer of intimacy to his practice. The lightness and earthy tan colors that characterize many of these paintings allude to the sensation of looking at the figures with the sun in your eyes. This palette imbues the work with a sense of destabilizing translucency and adds a sense of vibration to the figures, so that they themselves appear to be blinding the beholder. This blinding light is intended to symbolize the unending tenderness, grace, and care that the artist feels for his family. Borrowed from historical depictions of the divine, the artist continues to build an ideological vernacular centered around his family. When viewing these paintings, it is as though one becomes a sunflower themselves—devoted to following the sun that consistently illuminates Tovborg's imagery.

Alexander Tovborg (b. 1983, Copenhagen, Denmark) studied at the Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste, Karlsruhe, Germany and the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen, Denmark. Painting, drawing, sculpture, and performance share equal space in Tovborg's multidisciplinary practice that explores the roles that religion and mythology play in human identity and the world we inhabit. His research into the origins and contemporary iterations of symbology, mysticism, and religious archetypes has yielded varied bodies of work that span subjects such as the hallucinogenic and erotic first meeting of Adam and Eve, the lost adolescence of Jesus Christ, and a wedding procession of paintings representing the marriage of heaven and hell, among other examples.

Tovborg's work has been the subject of international solo exhibitions including *The Deity and its Creators*, Rudolph Tegner Museum & Statue Park, Dronningmølle, Denmark (2019); *Knight of Faith*, GL STRAND, Copenhagen, Denmark (2016); *The Rape of Europa*, State of Concept, Athens, Greece (2016); *Bocca Baciata*, Overgaden Institute for Contemporary Art, Copenhagen, Denmark (2014); *Teenage Jesus*, Hospitalhof, Stuttgart, Germany (2012); and *Tre*, Museet for Religiøs Kunst, Lemvig, Denmark (2011). Selections of his oeuvre have been featured in institutional group exhibitions including at the 9th Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art, Gothenburg, Sweden (2017); Museet for Religiøs Kunst, Lemvig, Denmark (2016); Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland (2013); and the Museo Nacional de la Estampa, Mexico City, Mexico (2012). At Blum & Poe, Los Angeles, CA in 2015, Tovborg's work was included in *The Avant-Garde Won't Give Up: Cobra and Its Legacy*, a rereading of the Cobra postwar movement curated by Alison M. Gingeras. Tovborg's work is represented in the public collections of the ARKEN Museum for Moderne Kunst, Ishøj, Denmark; ARoS Aarhus Art Museum, Aarhus, Denmark; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; and the Museet for Religiøs Kunst, Lemvig, Denmark.

About Blum & Poe

Blum & Poe was founded by Tim Blum and Jeff Poe in Santa Monica in September of 1994 as a space to show local and international contemporary art in all media. Blum's extensive experience in the Japanese art world combined with Poe's keen knowledge of emerging artists in Los Angeles resulted in an international program of influential artists. Throughout a twenty-seven-year history, Blum & Poe has shaped the trajectory of contemporary art by championing artists at all stages of their careers—cultivating the lineages

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that run between emerging and established practices and working with artist estates to generate new discourse surrounding historical work. Currently, Blum & Poe represents fifty artists and nine estates from sixteen countries worldwide.

In 2003 the gallery moved to a larger space in Culver City, and in 2009 Blum & Poe purchased and renovated its current 22,000-square-foot complex on La Cienega Boulevard. In this location the gallery has since staged museum-caliber surveys, examining the historical work of such movements as the Japanese Mono-ha school (2012); the Korean Dansaekhwa monochrome painters (2014); the European postwar movement CoBrA (2015); Japanese art of 1980s and '90s (2019); a rereading of Brazilian Modernism (2019); and a revisionist take on the 1959 MoMA exhibition, *New Images of Man* (2020). To produce these exhibitions, Blum & Poe has worked with celebrated curators such as Alison M. Gingeras, Sofia Gotti, Joan Kee, and Mika Yoshitake.

In 2014, Blum & Poe opened galleries in New York and Tokyo to focus on intimately scaled projects in new contexts. These expansions tie into the gallery's wide-reaching program that includes exhibitions, lectures, performance series, screenings, and an annual art book fair at its base in Los Angeles. Blum & Poe's publishing division democratically circulates its program through original scholarship and accessible media ranging from academic monographs, audio series, magazines, to artists' books. In 2020, the gallery launched Blum & Poe Broadcasts, an online platform showcasing artists' projects in conjunction with physical installations or as standalone digital endeavors.

Across the three global locations, Blum & Poe prioritizes environmental and community stewardship in all operations. In 2015, Blum & Poe was certified as an Arts:Earth Partnership (AEP) green art gallery in Los Angeles and consequently became one of the first green certified galleries in the United States. The gallery is also a member of the Gallery Climate Coalition, which works to facilitate a more sustainable commercial art world and reduce the industry's collective carbon footprint. Blum & Poe is committed to fostering inclusive and equitable communities both in their physical and online spaces and believes that everybody should have equal access to creating and engaging with contemporary art.

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