

# THE WHITE GODDESS

VANESSA BILLY

*curated by Rita Selvaggio*

Likewise at a fixed time  
Matutan sends abroad the rosy dawn  
through the coasts of heaven, and spreads the light [...]

Lucretius, *De rerum natura* (Book 5, 656-62)

Amalgamations of political ecology and the passage of energy from one entity to another, dystopian visions and lumps of mythological material: these are some of the themes explored in the practice of Vanessa Billy (1978, Geneva), characterized by a strong belief in hybridism and the capacity of elements for transmutation. The works on display occupy the space with a presence as corporeal as it is vulnerable, combining a variety of tangible forms and substances and translating the allusions to a moment or a transformative action that has the effect of anchoring them to the closest setting. Complying in fact with the interpretative principle of analogy, the layout of the exhibition connects up ideally with the *Mater Matuta* (5th century BCE), one of the most significant examples of the production of funerary statues in a kind of limestone called pietra fetida which can be seen here in Florence, at the nearby Archaeological Museum. In the guise of the lunar phases that mark the rhythm of time on a daily basis, Mater Matuta, with her expression of intense melancholy and gaze fixed beyond life on this earth, is the Latin goddess of dawn, fertility and birth.

Matuta is the "white goddess" – sister of the mirage and the echo – who, in her nakedly worn magnificence, brings us back to that instant outside any measure of time in which the myth first burst into the light. Into the same female dimension that since time immemorial has been connected with the moon and that evokes the mother in all her roles. She is the *White Goddess* that Robert Graves had sought in all of her many incarnations and metamorphoses. The woman's body offers the same microcosmic vision of the universal rhythms of the moon, a metaphor for cyclicity, change, the unconscious, the secret, mystery, maternity and fertility. It is a symbol of the passage of time and makes manifest its perpetual starting over and over again, the uninterrupted chain of births and deaths.

From dawn to dawn the earth turns and night continues to follow day.

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VANESSA BILLY (1978, Geneva, CH) studied at Chelsea College of Art, London.

Among her recent solo exhibitions: *Future Perfect* (2018) at Assembly Point, London; *Dear Life* (2017) at Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris; *We Dissolve* (2016) at Kunsthalle St.Gallen (CH).

Her public art commission *Tränen* can be seen until March 2019 at St.Peter Church in Zürich (CH).

Among her forthcoming projects: *Konkrete Gegenwart* (February 2019), at Haus Konstruktiv, Zürich, (CH); *Oil. Beauty and Horror in the Petrol Age* (September 2019), at Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg (DE) and Belvedere Museum, Vienna; solo show (September 2019) at BolteLang, Zürich (CH).

She currently lives and works in Zürich (CH).