

APALAZZOGALLERY

Servane Mary

Realms

29 May - 20 September 2025

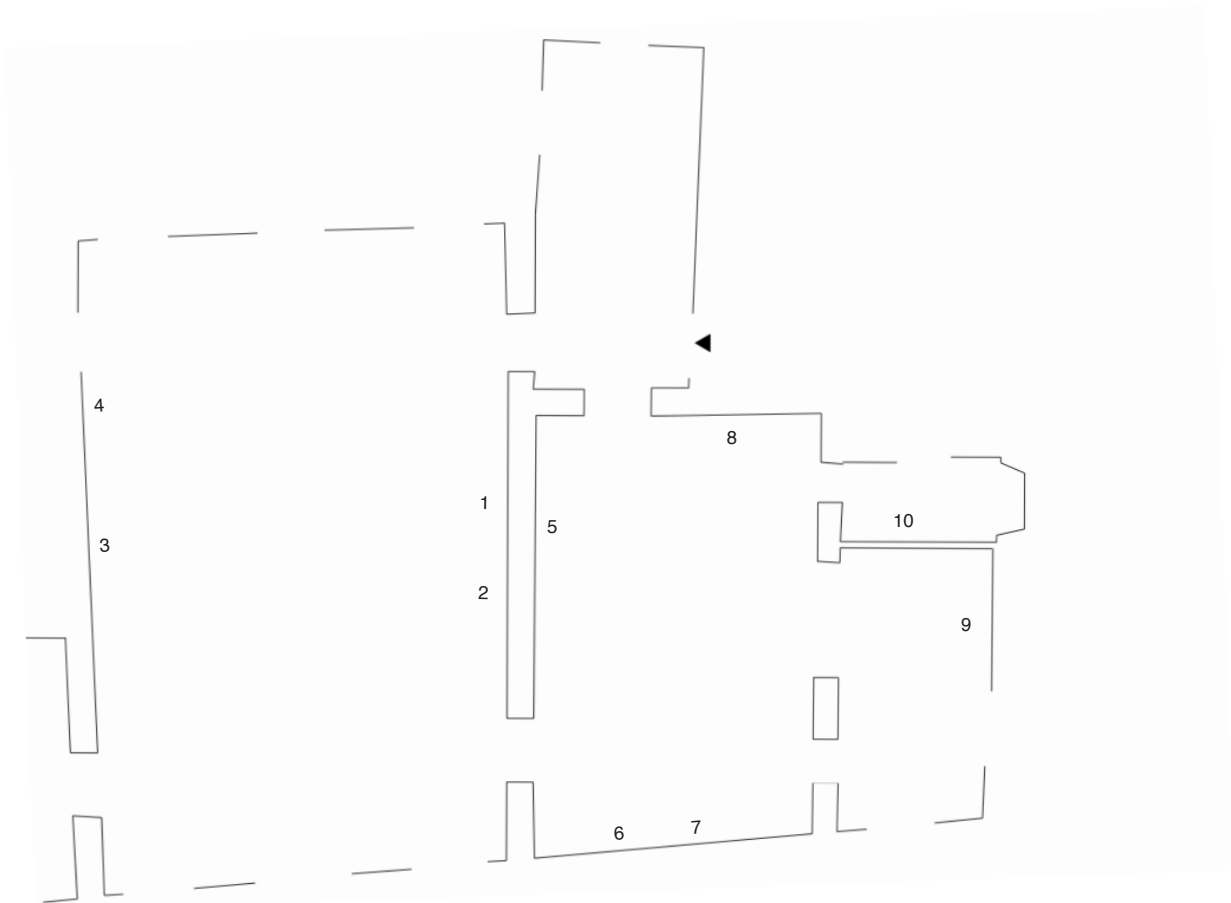
APALAZZOGALLERY is delighted to present *Realms*, a solo show by French-American artist **Servane Mary**.

This exhibition, the artist's fourth with the gallery, brings together a large corpus of previously unseen works that reflect the evolution of Mary's painterly research, characterised by a slow layering process. Through a poetics shaped as much by discipline as by unpredictability, Mary's work situates itself within the deepest dimensions of abstraction, in its purest form.

For the nine vertical canvases in *Realms*, Mary uses a colour palette composed of five hues: silver, cobalt blue, manganese blue, orange, and green. The different colours settle on top of one another, creating a nebulous cluster of dots that lend the compositions an immaterial, almost ethereal aura. This effect finds its fullest expression in the monumental wall painting that extends along the main gallery wall, created by the artist specifically for the occasion. Through a spraying technique, the artist has composed a silvery, iridescent ground, upon which veils of grey and silver hues have settled into streaks that, as Eva Brioschi notes in her accompanying text, evoke "the effect of rain densely streaking a grey, cloud-filled sky."

Servane Mary (b. 1972, Dijon, France) is a French-American artist based in New York. She earned her B.A. from the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs (ENSAD), Paris, in 1998. Mary is known for her conceptual works in which she prints historical images of women on unconventional materials, as well as for her paintings, which—like her earlier works—engage with the legacy of image-making. Her work has been featured in various exhibitions and institutional projects, including: *Nine Paintings*, Palazzo Biandra Mediolanum, Milan, Italy (2023); *Greater New York*, MoMA PS1, Long Island City, US (2021); *Glitches*, San Carlo, Cremona, Italy (2021), where she was invited to create a large-scale installation composed of three monumental paintings (each 5 x 5 meters) in a deconsecrated 17th-century church, and after the inaugural exhibition was selected for the 2022–2023 program; Swiss Institute, New York, US; Abrons Arts Center, New York, US; and JOAN, Los Angeles, which in 2019 presented *Remakes 2006–2018*, a survey of twelve years of work, accompanied by a monographic book published by Pacific. Her works are part of several collections, including the Schwartz Art Collection at Harvard Business School, Boston, US; Fonds Régional d'Art Contemporain, Franche-Comté (FRAC), France; Fonds Régional d'Art Contemporain (FRAC), Île-de-France, France; and the Tucson Museum of Contemporary Art, Tucson, US.

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1. *Dreaming of Pomegranates*, 2025

acrylic on canvas
199.4 x 171.4 cm
78 1/2 x 67 1/2 in

2. *Sea of Grass*, 2025

acrylic on canvas
199.4 x 171.4 cm
78 1/2 x 67 1/2 in

3. *High on the Mountain's Oxygen*, 2025

wall painting, acrylic on wall
457 x 650 cm
179 7/8 x 255 7/8 in

4. *A Crystal Fruit Stand*, 2025

acrylic on canvas
199.4 x 171.4 cm
78 1/2 x 67 1/2 in

5. *Dashing Diva*, 2025

acrylic on canvas
195.6 x 162.6 cm
77 x 64 in

6. *The Cockettes*, 2025

acrylic on canvas
195.6 x 162.6 cm
77 x 64 in

7. *The Swimming Pool*, 2025

acrylic on canvas
195.6 x 162.6 cm
77 x 64 in

8. *Cat Walk Glam*, 2025

acrylic on canvas
195.6 x 162.6 cm
77 x 64 in

9. *Galaxy Gourmet*, 2025

acrylic on canvas
195.6 x 162.6 cm
77 x 64 in

10. *The Powder Room*, 2025

acrylic on canvas
195.6 x 162.6 cm
77 x 64 in

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Realms

Text by Eva Brioschi

The word *realm* is used in a range of contexts, such as that of the *animal realm*, *the vegetable realm*, also with the meaning of *field*, *sector*, *context*, *environment* and *kingdom*.

Over the course of a recent telephone conversation, Servane Mary explored the various meanings of this term and confided that the one she connects with the most is *environment*. However, when I read the title, I immediately thought of the sense of kingdom: "Once upon a time in a faraway *kingdom*..." Some enchanted place and time, where things are not always quite what they seem and can quickly change in unexpected ways. And indeed, this description is akin to what we experience in this exhibition: a series of vertical canvases created using five colours; the first layer applied with silver acrylic; then, using a stencil with circular holes of about a quarter of an inch placed on the canvas, another layer of colour mixed with thickeners is poured and pushed to fill the holes with a spatula, letting uneven material protuberances accumulate. The same process is repeated for each pigment used: cobalt blue, manganese blue, orange and green. In total, each work may have up to eight or ten layers, which are then left to settle over a period of about seven days. The workstation is the floor, on which the canvas remains laid out while the paint is being applied. Once dry, it is hung on the wall to show the visual effect from a more conventional viewing perspective. However, the perimeter occupied by the canvas on the floor is marked out, so that when the next painting stage begins, it may be placed in exactly the same position. This ensures the painting also bears the memory of the place where it was created, through the traces of marks and unexpected events that the surface of the floor passes on through contact. An imprint that becomes a mark, a paradox: close to the phenomenon and at the same time far from the fact. Creation and memory; certainly not mimesis, yet not entirely invention either. These works thus carry with them fragments of this physical transfer from the ground and leave traces of those paints and materials to be found upon it by chance.

Everything takes place in a process that the artist herself defines as 'relational', insofar as the first level partly determines the morphology of the second, just as the surface on which the canvas is placed determined the first, in an interplay of cause and effect of which the result is materially unpredictable. I believe this balance between chance and determination, between discipline and the unexpected, constitutes the thread all artists love to tread, like fearless tightrope walkers. The artist both amazes and seeks amazement, searching for the wonder of the unexpected in her work, eager to discover herself, to find herself in her own works, if it is true that every work of art is ultimately a self-portrait. However, Mary names her works largely using the titles of paintings by other female painters who have passed away: Lavinia Fontana (Bologna 1552 – Florence 1614), Fede Galizia (Milan 1578 – Milan 1630) or Carla Accardi (Trapani 1924 – Rome 2014). Her 'self-portrait' thus becomes a group image, an attempt at sisterhood that is both a tribute to her fellow artists and a call to the public to pay closer attention, to remember or learn that there have been many female artists capable of walking that tightrope, even though few have watched them as they advanced so courageously.

In the past, Servane Mary worked by appropriating female images plucked from the jaws of oblivion, while here the appropriation is nominal; moreover, the image becomes abstract and the references purely ideal. The compositions that emerge in the paintings are immaterial, ethereal, resembling nimbus and cirrus clouds advancing in the foreground, as if emerging from a chemical explosion or a summer storm, where raindrops reverberate like cold, sparkling crystals amid the steam rising from the earth. I am reminded of William Turner's skies and Seurat's hand, preparing the canvas by applying broad, even brushstrokes, then breaking up the surface with short, incessant touches, dots and commas that break up the contours in search of synthesis via the human eye.

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These are iridescent surfaces that retain a characteristic peculiar to Mary: a metallic touch that makes them rough and coarse, and in their chameleon-like nature they lend themselves to becoming what we read in them, just like the clouds in the sky: mutant reptile skins, smoky curtains from which fairytale dragons with fiery tongues and glistening scales might emerge.

While the canvases described above reached Brescia along with memories of the architectural space that led in part to their creation, the space of the gallery's large central hall becomes the context for a site-specific installation that encompasses past, present and future. Working directly on the gallery wall, the artist applied silver spray paint, allowing the excess liquid to trickle down, thereby creating an effect similar to rain streaking across a grey, cloud-filled sky. Against this backdrop is one of the paintings created in the studio and then sent here: the past. The present is the installation we see when visiting the exhibition. The future is represented by tiny yet incessant changes that the combination of the ancient walls of the room and the chemistry of the materials used will produce, coupled with dust, climatic variations and photosensitisation. The relational process is a continuum that our eyes record at every moment as a unicum, represented by mental snapshots of which we will retain a trace.

The stratification that characterises Mary's working process therefore functions in both formal and theoretical as well as visual terms. Materials accumulate, tools alternate, experimentation embraces various media as it enters and leaves the studio. Art history is condensed within the work with equal generosity and inclusiveness. The visual datum also derives from an accumulation of stimuli: layers, traces, imprints and casts, residues left on a surface that the human eye cannot grasp in one single glance.

- Eva Brioschi

Eva Brioschi, art historian and author, she is curator of Collezione La Gaia di Busca and art director of the collection of Fondazione Antonio Dalle Nogare di Bolzano. She is on the board of directors of Carico Massimo in Livorno. Recent exhibitions and publishing projects include *Under the Spell of Duchamp*, Fondazione Antonio Dalle Nogare, Bolzano, Italy (2024-2025); *Atelier dell'Errore: Die Werkstatt*, Richard Saltoun Gallery, Rome, Italy (2024); *David Lamelas. I have to think about it*, Fondazione Antonio Dalle Nogare, Bolzano, Italy (2023); *Ibrahim Mahama. Voli-ni*, E.art.h., Verona, Italy, (Lenz Press, 2022); *Things/Thoughts*, Fondazione Antonio Dalle Nogare, Bolzano, Italy (2021); *Henri Chopin. Body Sound Space*, Quartz Studio, Turin, Italy (2020) and *Opera Aperta*, Courtesy Emilia Romagna, Arte Fiera, Bologna, Italy (2020).

APALAZZOGALLERY was founded by Francesca Migliorati and Chiara Rusconi in 2008 in Palazzo Cigola Fenaroli in Brescia, as a meeting and conversation place to promote contemporary art in all its manifold manifestations. The gallery offers an inclusive multidisciplinary and multicultural programme, supporting international and Italian, institutional and young emerging artists. Each project is designed and constructed through a long and careful dialogue between the space and the artist, the product of which is a solo or group exhibition that engages the space and its architecture innovatively. The gallery also supports this dialogue through art residencies and the promotion of artists through art fairs and international and local curatorial projects. The gallery represents Sonia Boyce, Ann Iren Buan, Edson Chagas, Giorgio Ciam, Raúl De Nieves, Nathalie Du Pasquier, Emkal Eyongakpa, Estate of Larry Stanton, Paolo Gonzato, Ibrahim Mahama, Eva & Franco Mattes, Olivier Mosset, Servane Mary, Estate of Jonas Mekas, Lucia Pescador, Marta Pierobon, Nathlie Provosty, Alan Reid, Olympia Scarry, Augustas Serapinas, Alexandra Sukhareva, The Reader, Francesco Vezzoli and Luc Ming Yan.

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