

Maria Szakats | Romance Apocalypse

29 November 2024 - 25 January 2025

Brooke Benington is pleased to present *Romance Apocalypse*, a solo exhibition by Maria Szakats that probes the layered nature of intimacy, exploring the nuances of beauty and vulnerability within both personal and cultural spheres. The exhibition will be at Brooke Benington's Fitzrovia gallery at 76 Cleveland Street, London W1T 6NB from 29 November 2024 - 25 January 2025. The public opening will take place on Thursday 28 November from 6-8 pm. The exhibition's title - partly inspired by a slogan on a t-shirt gifted by her partner - balances emotional warmth and intellectual reflection, echoing the questions posed by theorist Eva Illouz in *Consuming the Romantic Utopia*. Through this dual reference, Szakats invites viewers to consider the intersections of romantic ideals and societal pressures as they emerge in our closest relationships.

Szakats, who began her creative journey in fashion design, has an intuitive fluency with her chosen medium. Her works, created by embroidering and brushing mohair yarn over printed images, reveal scenes that are at once inviting and contemplative. This tactile softness resonates through themes of nurture and intimacy she explores, particularly in her focus on the breast - used to evoke simultaneous ideas provision and the earliest frustrations of dependency. This recurring motif draws from psychoanalytic theories, reflecting how early bonds of closeness shape our adult relationships.

Works such as *EAT I-III*, inspired by Kleist's *Penthesilea*, delve into complex dynamics of desire and disgust. The soft, blurred textures of mohair yarn enhance this sense of emotional ambiguity, exploring how beauty and repulsion can exist within the same experience. In each piece, viewers are encouraged to consider intimacy not as an absolute, but as a complex terrain where various layers of feeling coexist.

Throughout *Romance Apocalypse*, Szakats introduces rich imagery, including spiders as protectors and cave-like portals, evoking a sense of both sanctuary and exposure. Her use of tornado imagery captures moments of dramatic change, where intense forces move through our lives, shaping the paths of relationships and underscoring their inherent unpredictability.

This meditative yet visceral process - embroidering, then brushing mohair yarn to create an ethereal blur - allows Szakats to render moments of both immediacy and reflection. In merging personal references with mythological and art-historical influences, *Romance Apocalypse* offers a view into the intricate fabric of intimacy, encouraging viewers to engage with its shifting, beautiful, and sometimes frightening landscape.