

TEMPLON



Press release
22 July 2024

PRUNE NOURRY

Vénus

11 January – 1 March 2025

OPENING: Saturday 11 January, 10 am to 8 pm



Prune Nourry in the Saint-Denis studio © Eléa-Jeanne Schmitter, 2024

Following on from solo exhibitions with Galerie Templon in Brussels in 2017 and 2022 and Paris in 2019 and 2021, Prune Nourry has been invited back by the gallery to show her work at the large space on Rue du Grenier-Saint-Lazare in Paris from January to March 2025. The artist is unveiling *Vénus*, a project that continues the tradition of her previous work exploring women's role in society using the symbolism of clay: *Terracotta Daughters* (2011-2031), *Mater Earth* (2020-2023) and *Statues Also Breathe* (2022).

The *Vénus* project is the fruit of Prune Nourry's encounter with Ghada Hatem, a gynaecologist and obstetrician who founded the Maison des Femmes in Saint-Denis, a support centre for women who are victims of violence. The centre is part of a hospital and offers women in Seine-Saint-Denis who are struggling multi-disciplinary support and care. The artist met eight women at the centre's workshops

Address: 28 Rue du Grenier-Saint-Lazare, 75003 Paris. Opening hours: Tuesday to Saturday, 10 am - 7 pm
Press contact: Camille Desprez, camille.desprez@templon.com tel.: +33 (0) 1 42 72 14 82 @galerietemplon

(that cover areas such as literacy, theatre and dance) who agreed to pose naked for her, courageously overcoming social taboos related to their culture or personal taboos rooted in their traumas. Echoing her approach with *Projet Phenix* in 2021, Prune Nourry chose to revive the tradition of portraiture as she sculpted in an even more intimate setting, between a woman sculptor and a woman model. The artist drew on each woman's unique story – the women who wished to do so told her about their lives during the sittings – and diverse body shapes to model clay busts of them in the style of prehistoric Venus statues. Their words inspired each work just as much as the details of their bodies. The portraits, human-sized or small-scale, were then moulded before being cast in bronze covered in a layer of clay, or cast in terracotta.

Prune Nourry asked the women models to strike the same poses, static and standing, as the Venus figurines of the past. A choice rooted in various encounters (including with Catherine Schwab, chief heritage curator in charge of the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic collections at the Musée d'Archéologie nationale in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, who is from Seine-Saint-Denis) and her research into Palaeolithic Venuses (from the Gravettian period) which she began in late 2022 to prepare the piece she created in tandem with Kengo Kuma for Saint-Denis – Pleyel station.

The past and present, personal and universal are inextricably linked throughout the project, a theme that is a wellspring of the sculptor's work as illustrated by her exhibition at the Musée National des Arts Asiatiques (Guimet) in Paris in 2017.

Creation myths and clay are central to Prune Nourry's work. In 2023 she inaugurated a permanent installation at the Château La Coste, *Mater Earth*, the name referring to the Latin root for "mother" and "maternity" but also the "matter" that is clay. She has been involved in a collaborative project since 2022, *Statues Also Breathe*, with the Ile-Ife University in Nigeria inspired by the Yoruba creation myth. Steeped in oral tradition and predating written monotheistic religions, the myth recounts how humanity was sculpted from the clay of Ife. Another long-term project she has been working on since 2011 is *Terracotta Daughters*, an army of little girls made of terracotta, life-size figures that are buried in a secret location in China where they will stay until 2030.

Prune Nourry's design of the Galerie Templon exhibition is tied to the *Les Vénus dionysiennes* commission she undertook in tandem with architect Kengo Kuma for the Grand Paris Express metro line in the Saint-Denis – Pleyel station inaugurated in June 2024. The commission, supported by Société des Grands Projets under the artistic and cultural direction of José-Manuel Gonçalves with CENTQUATRE-PARIS and the Eva Albarran & Co. agency, will be installed in 2026.

To embed herself in Saint-Denis before the installation, Prune Nourry decided to move her studio from April to July 2024. Saint-Denis district council invited her to take up an arts residency in Villa D., a former shelter for girls and future art centre. It was there that she invited the women for their sittings, with the Maison des Femmes close by.

Prune Nourry fills the gallery space with sculptures that evoke the *Vénus dionysiennes* she created for Saint-Denis – Pleyel station: a series of eight small bronzes with a patina resembling clay as well as a life-size prototype of Venus (170 cm) to underscore the monumental scale of the future installation in the station's atrium.

In the basement is an installation made up of thirty moulds produced at the Saint-Denis Atelier de moulage du GrandPalaisRmn, a custodian of cultural heritage and unique crafts and a living record of the entire history of world sculpture. Prune Nourry made a careful selection from the workshop's collection of moulds to create her own sculptures. She chose different representations of the divine feminine, assembled in hybrid form or pieced together to trace the history of art of Venus, from prehistory to the 20th century on several continents. The workshop supported her artistic project by giving her access to its collection, its teams' specialist skills and its craftworkers' age-old expertise. The documentary film shown as part of the exhibition portrays the relationship between the artist and her models as well as the creative process. It was made by Vincent Lorca (who documents her work: *L'Amazone Érogène*, *Projet Phenix*, *Mater Earth* and *Statues Also Breathe*) in association with the Femmes à la Caméra collective.

These past and present Venuses thus remind us that, transcending the sculptures' varying shapes and origins and the many hues of the clay used to make them, we all come from the same earth and will return to the earth.

Born in 1985 in Paris where she studied at École Boulle, Prune Nourry lives and works in New York and Paris. In her projects the artist raises ethical questions related to the notion of balance in the broadest sense: the body and healing, the demographic imbalance due to gender selection and scientific excesses, the ecosystem, and the interdependence between living species.

Her artistic approach combines sculpture, installations, performances and video. Her work has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions, including *Holy*, *Carte Blanche à Prune Nourry*, Musée Guimet, Paris, France (2017), *Daughters*, Château de Malromé, Saint-André-du-Bois, France (2018), *La destruction n'est pas une fin en soi*, Les Rencontres de la photographie, Les Magasins Électriques, Arles, France (2018), *Amazone Érogène*, Le Bon Marché – Rive Gauche, Paris, France (2021), *L'Amazone Érogène* (Arc), a monumental installation in the Great Hall of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels, Belgium (2022), and *Ligne de vie*, Musée de La Poste, Paris, France (2023). Her art has also featured in numerous group exhibitions, including *Anima*, The Invisible Dog Art Center, New York, USA (2016), *Bêtes de Scène*, Fondation Villa Datris, L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, France (2019), *Mettre au monde*, Centre d'Art Contemporain de l'Ar[T]senal, Dreux, France (2022), *Sculpture Garden*, Biennale, Crans-Montana, Switzerland (2023), *Breasts*, Palazzo Franchetti, Venice, Italy (2024), *faire corps*, Fondation Villa Datris, Paris, France (2024) and *Atys*, Domaine de Chaumont-sur-Loire, France (2024). Her performance art includes *Les Bébés domestiques*, performance, Tokyo, Japan (2008), *Holy Daughters*, performance, New Delhi, India (2010), *Spermbar*, installation and performance, 5th Avenue, commissioned by the Institut français Alliance Française (FIAF) as part of the Crossing the Line Festival, New York, USA (2011), *Le Dîner procréatif*, solo exhibition and performance, Flux Laboratory, Geneva, Switzerland (2013), *Le Dîner archéologique*, performance in collaboration with Michelin-starred chef Jean François Piège, Centquatre-Paris, France (2014) and *The Amazon*, installation and performance, Hudson River and Standard Plaza Hotel, New York, USA (2018).

She took her *Terracotta Daughters* army, inspired by the Xi'an terracotta warriors, on a world tour between 2013 and 2015, from Paris to Shanghai with stopovers in Zurich, New York and Mexico City,

before burying it in China where it will stay until 2030. Produced in 2019, her film *Serendipity* was presented at the Berlin Film Festival, MoMa DOC Fortnight documentary film festival and Tribeca Film Festival and shown as part of the Art Basel film programme.

In early 2022 she created the sets for *Atys*, a new version of the opéra-ballet composed by Jean-Baptiste Lully for Louis XIV, directed and choreographed by Angelin Preljocaj. The production ran at the Grand Théâtre Genève then the Opéra Royal de Versailles. The artist then installed a solo exhibition at Galerie Templon in Brussels, *Infinite Arrows*, an in-depth exploration of the symbolism of the arrow and geometric forms, echoing the minimalist movement in the USA. At the same time Prune Nourry completed a large immersive, environmentally friendly sculpture for the Château La Coste: a pregnant woman lying on her back emerges from the ground, *Mater Earth*. A large-scale sculpture project was unveiled in late 2022, created in collaboration with the families of the kidnapped Chibok girls in Nigeria and Obafemi-Awolowo University in Ile-Ife. *Statues Also Breathe* comprises a group of 108 sculpted clay heads based on the schoolgirls' portraits and inspired by the ancient heads of Ife, a documentary and a podcast. Its goal is to raise awareness about the plight of the missing girls while highlighting the global struggle for girls' education.