



*The Beguine*, 2025, oil on linen, 121.9 x 152.4 cm (48 x 60 in.)

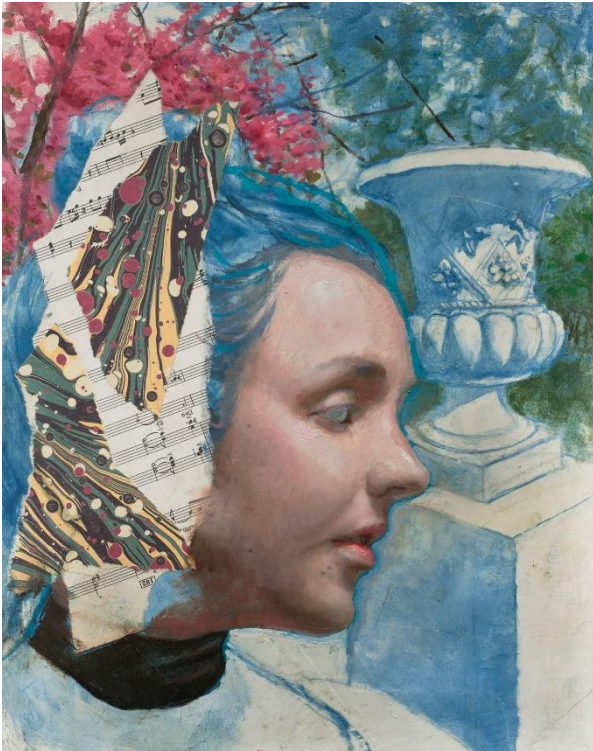
## Robert Zeller: The Fragment is the Whole

September 12 – October 16, 2025

Preview: Thursday September 11, 6–8pm

19 East 66<sup>th</sup> Street, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Floors, New York, NY 10065

Robilant+Voena is delighted to announce an exhibition of new work by Robert Zeller, entitled *The Fragment is the Whole*. The selection of works in the exhibition reflect the artist's extensive research and knowledge of art historical periods, combining elements that reflect the legacy of twentieth-century movements including **Surrealism** and **Dadaism**, interspersed with more classical tropes. A writer and curator as well as visual artist, Zeller journeys through realms of meaning to explore the construction of non-linear narratives using layers of painting, drawing and collage, opening space for the viewer to engage with profoundly personal themes, such as memory, love and loss.



*In the Garden of the Sun*, 2024, oil and paper collage on linen, 35.6 x 27.9 cm (14 x 11 in.)

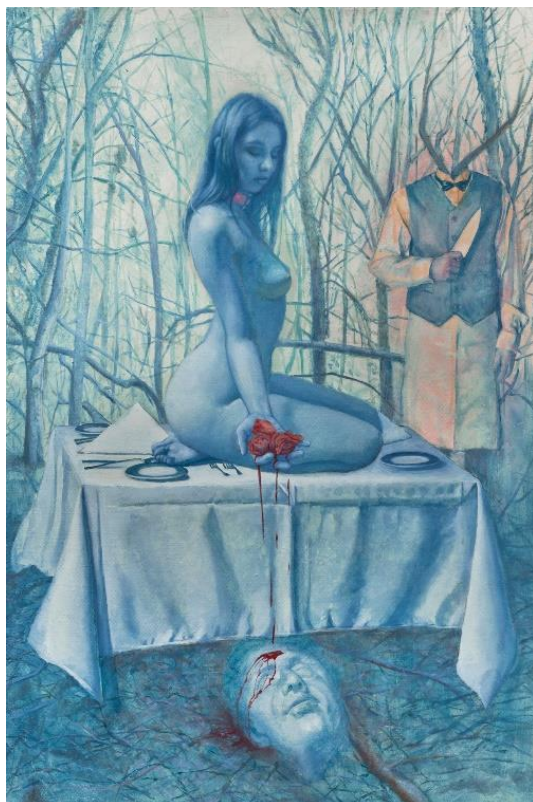
In *The Fragment is the Whole*, Zeller explores the figurative use of pictorial space through overlapping imagery and abstract compositional elements to convey unconscious, non-linear narratives that reference both art history and contemporary culture. The compositions draw upon varied influences: partly inspired by Surrealist, Dada and Cubist collage, as well as the landscapes and interiors of the Flemish Primitives, the works also take direction from the imagery of Rococo and Barbizon artists. The narratives involve the underworld (death) and memory, love, loss and spiritual awakenings. Sensual and alluring, the locales of these scenes are landscapes of the mind, the psyche, involving forms of Nature – trees, branches, roots – mixed with classical drawn or painted forms, namely portraits and nudes. In the smaller works, Zeller also includes collaged elements such as sheet music, gold leaf, stock reports, and poetry. In the

larger pieces, he employs linear perspective to create a sense of the passage of time and infinity.

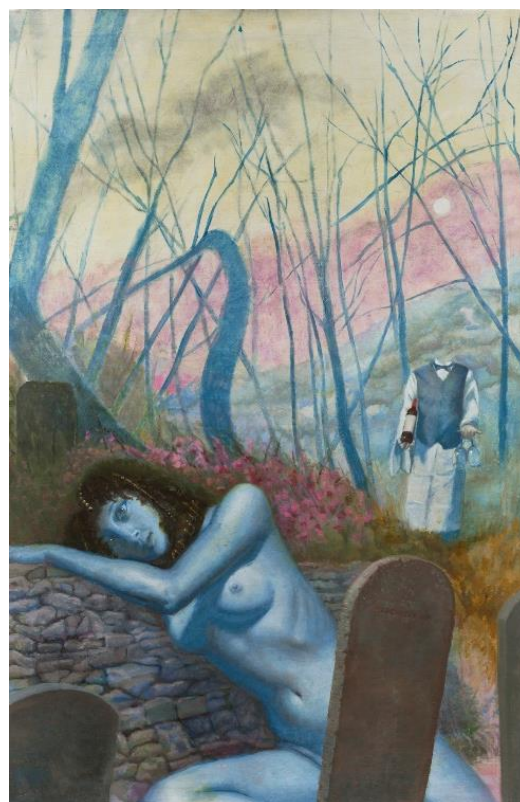
Among the wide-ranging inspirations, a common thread that weaves through the works is an engagement with historical feminist themes, revisited and seen afresh, underlining their contemporary resonance. One of the larger pieces in the show, *The Beguine* (pictured at the start of this release), encapsulates these ideas; Zeller was inspired to make this work by a recent visit to the famous Princely Beguinage Ten Wijngaerde in Bruges while undertaking research for his upcoming book on contemporary Belgian art. There, the artist encountered the historical movement of lay-women in Belgium, known as *beguines*, who chose to live in a convent-like community without formally retiring from the world, sharing a communal lifestyle that emphasized reflection and contemplation. Originating in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the movement was a self-initiated response to support a surplus of unattached women in urban centers, which also facilitated individual members' spiritual development.

In Zeller's painting, a lone female figure in 19<sup>th</sup>-century dress dances in a geometric grid-cum-meadow, two colored orbs of light floating like tangible hopes or sparks from another dimension. This vision of a female figure, visibly liberated through dancing, is an homage to the extraordinary beguines across time. It also speaks to other works in the show, which depict female protagonists in a similar state of spiritual or existential contemplation. The recurrence of visual motifs across multiple paintings is further illustrated by the sculpted male head dripping with blood near the right edge of the work; this subject appears also in *The Table* (below), where a woman holds flowers that drip blood onto a decapitated statue of a Roman senator, perhaps signaling the demise of the patriarchal order. Similarly, the

headless waiter in the background of this painting is likewise seen in *The Broken Engagement* (below); such repetition of recognisable forms echoes the approach of many of the great Surrealist painters, who used favorite tropes as signifiers to tap into a visual language not always directly associable with verbal equivalents.



*The Table*, 2022, oil on linen, 91.4 x 71.1 cm (36 x 28 in.)



*The Broken Engagement*, 2024, oil on linen, 91.4 x 66 cm (36 x 26 in.)

Zeller's curiosity and deep engagement with history is evident throughout the show; *The Adonia* and *The Adonia II* evoke the classical Athenian festivals celebrated solely by women, which addressed sexual or reproductive subjects, while *A Rococo Conversation* (below), a vanitas pastoral, features a woman wearing a masked costume evocative of Rococo *fêtes galantes*, alongside a skull, a raven and an ornate mirror. The subjects have a sense of being in dialog with one another and also, it seems, with the viewer, given the mirror's outward orientation and the woman turning over her shoulder. Not exclusively female in subject matter, Zeller's investigative realm encompasses male historical subjects too; *General Lee in Hades* conjures an apocryphal American Civil War denouement – a dreamlike apparition of the Southern military leader in the Underworld, ruminating on his defeat by Union forces. In *The Decision*, the central male figure – the aforementioned waiter, a recurring character in Zeller's work – with arm raised in consternation, finds himself set between two female archetypes: a libelous, sexualized female to this left, and a giantess in a demure yellow dress to his right, her head cut out of the composition.



*A Rococo Conversation*, 2021, oil on linen, 71.1 x 106.7 cm (28 x 42 in.)

**Robert Zeller** is a visual artist, writer and curator who received a BFA from a joint program of the Boston Museum School and Tufts University, and an MFA from the New York Academy of Art. He maintains studio practices in both Brooklyn and Long Island, where he creates Surrealist-inspired work. His writing and curatorial projects are enriched by his creative studio practice, and vice versa. Zeller's art has been exhibited in New York City at 511, Booth, Forbes and Palo Galleries. His works feature in private and corporate collections in the US, Europe and Mexico. In addition, the artist is the recipient of two Posey Fellowships and a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant.

Zeller has written for the Brooklyn Rail, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, and many other publications. He is the author of two books for the Monacelli Press, an imprint of Phaidon, [The Figurative Artist's Handbook](#) (2017), and [New Surrealism: The Uncanny in Contemporary Painting](#) (2023). He has given interviews for *The New York Times*, *CNN* and *Whitehot* magazine, and his books have been reviewed by *MutualArt*, *Hyperallergic*, and *Juxtapoz* among others. Zeller has given lectures and moderated talks at Rizzoli Books (NYC), Lyles & King (NYC) and Gagosian Beverly Hills.



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### Notes to editors

Robilant+Voena is a partnership of art dealers Edmondo di Robilant and Marco Voena. They launched R+V in London in 2004. Further gallery spaces were opened in Milan in 2009, and Paris and New York in 2020. R+V has distinguished itself as one of the leading international art dealers in Old Master paintings, as well as 20<sup>th</sup>-century Italian art. In recent years, the gallery's dual specialisms in European Old Master paintings and 20<sup>th</sup>-century Italian art have been complemented by a carefully curated programme of contemporary projects, working with artists whose practices build upon the artistic inheritance of the past.

R+V is committed to excellence across all its activities. The gallery strives to create dynamic, thought-provoking exhibitions that juxtapose the old and the new, creating unexpected links between artists working across the centuries and drawing out eternal themes through art.

The gallery has sold paintings and works of art to many important private and royal collectors and museums including the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the Frick Collection, the Gallerie dell'Accademia Venice, the Louvre Abu Dhabi, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Musée d'Orsay, Paris, the National Gallery, London, the National Gallery of Stockholm, the Museum of Western Art Tokyo, and the Pinacoteca di Brera Milan. R+V is represented at the most prestigious fine art fairs in the world, and is committed to its active exhibitions program and the publication of books and scholarly catalogues.

### **Current and upcoming exhibitions**

#### New York

*Daniel Ambrosi: Central Park*, October 24 – December 4

#### London

*Stephen Appleby-Barr. Mesocosmos*, May 23 – August 8

#### Milan

*A Mysterious Vision. The Uncanny and Lingering Influences of Surrealism in Contemporary Art*,  
September 9 – October 17

### **Art fairs**

Arte+Collezionismo, Rome, September 18 – 23

Frieze Masters, London, October 15 – 19