



**Provocative and poetic:
on the connecting power of art as ritual**
Pélagie Gbaguidi
November 2 - December 14, 2024

In her 2018 series of drawings *De-Fossilisation Of The Look, Dialogue With Madonna Del Parto*, Pélagie Gbaguidi (1965, SN/BJ) responds to the iconic work of Piero della Francesca (c 1460) and his depiction of the holy Virgin. Piero portrayed the pregnant Virgin Mary, standing in a tent. The canopies of the tent are held open by two almost identical angels and they look straight into the audience's eyes, as if they were standing on the stage of a theatre. Mary has heavy-lidded eyes, closed halfway, her gaze is turned inwards and she stands with one hand at her side, to support her belly, and with the other hand she points to the slit in her blue dress. The attributes carried by the pregnant Mary in other medieval portraits are missing, but the slit running the length of her bulging belly seems full of promise.

In one of Gbaguidi's drawings, we see a figure wearing a blue dress, with a similar slit at the front as in Piero's fresco, but this opening suggests eroticism and flaming sexuality. Two black arms reaching down from above the figure appear to hold up the skirt of the dress. Another figure can be seen to the right behind the standing figure. This one carries a handbag clasped in two heavily beringed hands. On the left in the background, the outline of another figure shines through. The drawing is set to paper in quick lines. Unlike Piero's serene and monumental Mary with her heavy-lidded eyes, this high-heeled Mary seems to claim an autonomous individuality, while the contemporary angel with the bag looks the audience in the eye as compellingly as the duo in Piero della Francesca's painting.

Gbaguidi unravels, in this series of drawings, the historical codes associated with the depiction of (sanctified) motherhood, the symbols that surround motherhood and the feminine, developed in a patriarchal tradition. In her drawings, we see not the classic linear perspective but the simultaneity of the fish-eye lens: everything exists side by side, without hierarchy and everything is embraced and revisited from within, with a striking urgency.